

COLUMBIA JOURNALISM REVIEW

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DON TERRY

THE RISE OF PRIVATE NEWS

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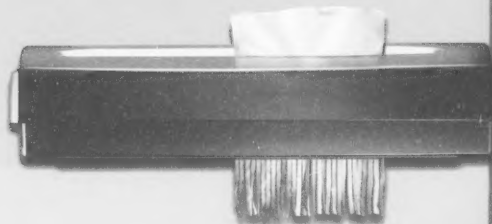
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COLUMBIA JOURNALISM REVIEW

July/August 2010

"To assess the performance of journalism... to help stimulate continuing improvement in the profession, and to speak out for what is right, fair, and decent."

—from the founding editorial, 1961



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The monetary rewards of being Sea Sick.

\$75,000 Grantham Prize honors Alanna Mitchell, author of *Sea Sick: The Global Ocean in Crisis*.



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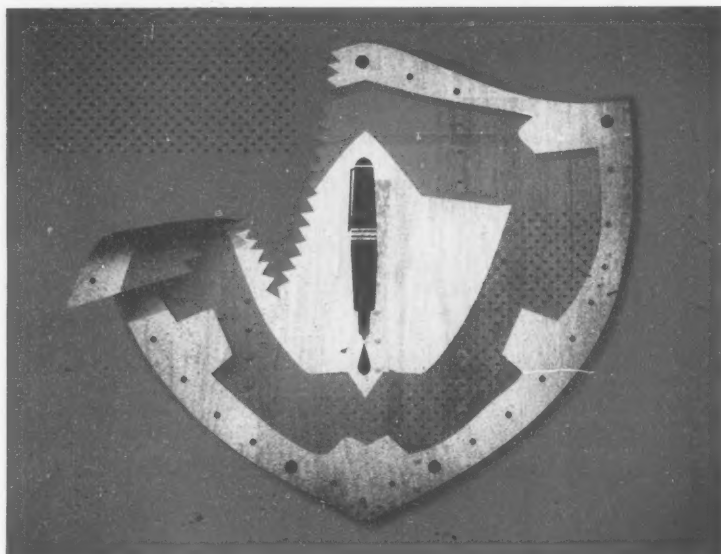
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Opening Shot



Five years ago, *The Times-Picayune* was just another metropolitan daily struggling to adapt to the digital age. Then Hurricane Katrina hit, and the paper's heroic performance was turned into the stuff of legend by a journalism industry desperate for evidence that it still mattered. And it was a great story. *The Times-Picayune* was driven from its newsroom but never stopped publishing on its Web site; its reporters and editors were victims of the storm even as they covered it; they put down the banner of strict objectivity and unfurled their outrage. Now, the city and its newspaper face another test—a disastrous oil spill—and are staring at a hurricane season predicted to be “extremely active.” And as precarious as the news business was in 2005, in 2010 it is more so, thanks to the economic meltdown. Douglas McCollam, a *CJR* contributing editor and New Orleans native who wrote about the *T-P* in our November/December 2005 issue, says the double whammy of Katrina and the economic crisis hit the paper hard. It has lost a number of experienced reporters and editors, and circulation never returned to pre-Katrina levels. Is the paper up to the challenge? For McCollam's snapshot of *The Times-Picayune* five years after Katrina, go to www.cjr.org/behind_the_news/timespicayune_five_years_later.php. **CJR**

Outrage The oil flowing into the Gulf of Mexico since the Deepwater Horizon drilling rig sank on April 22 is causing an environmental and economic disaster whose impact will last for decades.



Shield Abuse

A bogus argument stretches a good law to the breaking point

We like shield laws. They encourage the flow of information by allowing reporters to promise anonymity to sources, without fear of subpoenas. We believe in freedom of information laws, too. They let the public in on public business. In a case we're involved in, New York State is cynically pitting the former against the latter, in a way that could ultimately damage the shield. ¶ The story begins with our reporter, Clint Hendler, who covers poli-

tics and transparency issues. In March, Hendler submitted a request under New York's Freedom of Information Law (FOIL) asking for e-mail traffic between the press and two members of Governor David Paterson's communications staff, Peter Kauffman and Marissa Shorenstein, before they both resigned. The background: in February, local media were abuzz with speculation about a coming *New York Times* story on the governor. Among the wildest rumors was that the *Times* would expose such tabloid-ready topics as drug use and orgies. In fact, the *Times* series, published in February, was tamer, though it did explore potential abuse of power by a governor intent on protecting a favored aide accused of domestic assault.

Hendler thought the interplay between the media and a press office enmeshed in the controversy during this period could yield something interesting. Like all good reporters, he had been inspired by others: John Cook, then of Gawker,

now of Yahoo! News, had made a similar—and successful—request during the meltdown of the previous governor, Eliot Spitzer; Cook, in turn, had been inspired by *The State*, which had used South Carolina's open records law to obtain e-mails between Governor Mark Sanford's press office and reporters during the period when Sanford was "hiking the Appalachian Trail" in Argentina in June 2009.

On April 29, New York denied Hendler's request on two grounds. In one argument, it said these records were "competitively sensitive information" since they could reveal "ongoing lines of research" being pursued by reporters. This form of exemption, we're told, has usually applied to specifics that could cause substantial competitive harm—industrial plans, product formulas, and so forth. We doubt that reporters' scoops rise to that level. And the scoop argument feels increasingly lightweight given that Hendler's request is for records six months old and counting.

But the state's other argument is particularly bogus. New York's FOIL says public records can be withheld if they are "specifically exempted" from disclosure by state or federal statute. And as such a statute, New York cited its shield law, which protects journalists from subpoenas in the case of news "received in confidence" and also grants a qualified privilege for all information reporters obtain in the normal course of news-gathering, unless a judge decides that it is highly material, critical to court action, and unobtainable from other sources.

We find the argument specious. First, we are seeking government e-mail records—not newsroom records or knowledge. These are available to users of FOIL as a matter of course. The FOIL is a tool to get records out of the government, not a subpoena aimed at journalists.

More importantly, shield law privileges are for reporters, not sources. Taken to its logical extension, New York's argument would stretch the shield far beyond the law's intention, weakening it past the breaking point. Finally, the Paterson administration had no problem releasing similar records when they were about the previous governor, Spitzer, when Cook successfully asked for them.

Perhaps most important, if we are to push for a federal shield law and protect the state shields that already exist, we need to stay true to their spirit, to work to keep them viable. And if we are to keep freedom of information laws strong, we need to exercise them, and to resist phony rejections.

So, governor, we'd like to see those e-mails, please. **CJR**

Deans of Major University Journalism Schools Lay Out a Vision For a Dynamic News Future

Dear FCC Chairman Genachowski:

As deans of leading schools of journalism, we applaud the FCC for its vision and vigorous engagement with momentous changes in the media landscape. These changes touch the heart of who we are as a democratic nation in the 21st century. To thrive in this challenging new information-age world, it is more important than ever that our free and independent media remain vigilant as the watchdogs and guardians of American democracy.

For journalism schools, this is a moment of opportunity. Many schools are expanding their ties to media outlets of all types, legacy and digital. We are creating new alliances and partnerships with practitioners, through which we can research and analyze and disseminate knowledge of best practices, successes and failures in the professions. Some of us are exploring options to become more like the communications equivalent of university teaching hospitals, by partnering with local news outlets to undertake journalistic work that also emphasizes pedagogical and professional best practices. We are teaching community members digital literacy, and how to become citizen journalists. We are creating service learning courses where our students learn how to effectively build and grow local digital news platforms.

In pursuit of greater service to the American people, we have engaged in national policy and legal debates, testifying before Congress, the Courts, the FCC, the FTC, and other agencies that will shape the future of our media ecosystem.

We believe there are several areas where additional collaboration with other stakeholders, including government at all levels, can be beneficial to the goal of a healthy and independent media sector.

At the federal level:

1. When contemplating policy changes or changes to law, regulators and lawmakers should regularly call on our expertise at hearings and in requests for comments;
2. The FCC should look favorably on experimental license applications from journalism and communications schools to explore new forms of distribution;
3. Congress should create a special fund through the Department of Education for journalism scholarships, especially for disadvantaged students;
5. The FCC, when renewing licenses for commercial or non-commercial broadcasters, should add "points" to their evaluation for partnerships and other engagements with educational institutions;
6. Public broadcasting entities like NPR, PBS and the CPB, and also local stations, should look to support new partnerships with schools of journalism and communication. There are ample opportunities to work together—from internships, to joint research, to more direct engagement with news collection and distribution.

Mr. Chairman, we share with you the sense of urgency and need for innovation that this constitutive moment in media history requires. Please feel free to call on us in the future, and we look forward to even more cooperative relationships with you and your colleagues in the new media environment.

Sincerely yours,

Member Deans of the Carnegie-Knight Initiative on the Future of Journalism Education, supported by Carnegie Corporation of New York and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

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LETTERS

Send letters
letters@cjr.org

I'm Looking, I'm Looking!

I've never heard of Maureen Tkacik ("Look at Me!" *CJR*, May/June). That's my fault for being a technology blogger who is also having an existential crisis about the industry and where great content will come from in general, but after reading this piece I want to meet her for drinks and talk for hours upon hours.

Stefan Constantinescu
Editor, IntoMobile
Helsinki, Finland

As a news consumer, I don't want my daily news delivered by someone who is in the process of working out her various neuroses and ennui. But I think Tkacik has a lot of promise in the long-form. Try to get over that exhibitionist neediness—maybe go after a story, as you've tried, that is bigger than yourself. In journalism, it isn't supposed to be all about you.

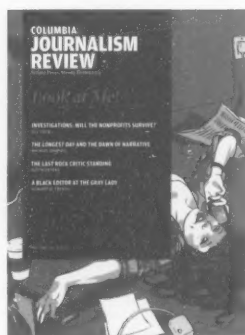
Tom

Comment posted on *CJR.org*

Unfairly Bitten

As the editor at *The New York Times* responsible for recruiting the Chicago News Cooperative (CNC) to supply local coverage for our papers distributed in the Chicago area, I am particularly disappointed in the ungenerous tone of Jamie Kalven's article ("Bite the Hand That Feeds," *CJR*, May/June).

He raises a specious concern about the CNC's ability to report independently about issues of interest to its donors and board members and then offers no evidence that his fear is well founded. I can see that he has a genuine concern about the way that the University of Chicago conducts itself as a neighbor in Chicago. And I can see that he's quite knowledgeable about the MacArthur Foundation's views about public housing. But I don't see that he asked anyone at the CNC about what it's doing to insulate itself from the influence of its donors and board members. More to the



I don't want my daily news delivered by someone working out her various neuroses and ennui.

point, I don't see that he's adduced any evidence of any influence on the CNC's content—or even read it.

This guilt-by-association thing cuts many ways. For example, CNC has a very close relationship with the *Times*. We talk to its editors daily. Our editors and theirs kick CNC copy back and forth before it's published. I'd readily issue a Gary Hart-style challenge to Kalven to find evidence that the CNC's relationship with either MacArthur or the University of Chicago is anything close to that intimate.

Perhaps that's why our influence on the CNC's reporting is so much stronger, as is the influence of the CNC's editors Jim O'Shea, Jim Kirk, and David Greising. All of them, like the *Times*, are committed to reporting without fear or favor on a wide range of Chicago institutions. And all of us have our reputations riding on whether we do just that.

After my copy of the *Columbia Journalism Review* arrived in the mail, I went back to review some of the articles we've published from the CNC just in the last couple of months. I found tough, original reporting on the neighborhood and housing issues that Kalven's analysis suggests we'd be missing. Articles like "Suburbs Unite in Quest for Federal Housing Aid, but Are Shut Out," by Juan-Pablo Velez, May 7, 2010; "Unexpected Repairs Rattle Owners of New Condos," by Daniel Libit, April 23, 2010; and "Problem of Vacant Houses Resists Easy Solution," by Jim O'Shea, April 4, 2010.

There are so many real problems in American journalism today—including, possibly, the ulterior motives of some of the people and institutions backing nonprofit journalism. But let's not waste quite so much time and space imagining problems where none exist.

Jim Schachter
Editor, Digital Initiatives
The New York Times
New York, NY

I agree with Kalven that with grants, journalists need to err on the side of biting the hand that feeds in order to keep public discourse alive. But I'd have liked him to clarify how this is different from the old challenges of placating advertisers and subscribers? The only difference he cited was the "uncharted territory" of dealing with grants, which seems insubstantial to me. The old system is in crisis; it's a bad time to be afraid of the new. Yet Kalven acknowledged that he's setting up a nonprofit funded by grants himself. So I suppose he means to support these ventures and put journalists on their guard—but against what?

Jenny Gavacs
Chicago, IL

'Alive' and Kicking

"Stayin' Alive" by Justin Peters (*CJR*, May/June) about Christopher R. We-

ingarten was well told. Like a good *New Yorker* profile, this offered three things: 1) a personal connection with Weingarten, instilled from a steadfast objective viewpoint, balanced with 2) an increased interest in the topic and the ideas Peters (and Weingarten) developed (I am not usually impressed by reflections on Twitter culture, but this was an exception), both of which Peters

imparted with 3) smooth, effortless entertainment.

Bob Wood
Indianapolis, IN

A Reporter's Reporter

Michael Shapiro's Second Read of Cornelius Ryan's book *The Longest Day*, which retold the events of D-Day ("The Reporter Whom Time Forgot," *CJR*, May/

NOTES FROM OUR ONLINE READERS

ON THE DAY COLUMBIA'S GRADUATE SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM SENT OUT into the world its newest crop of alums, we asked in our May 18 News Meeting, what advice, likely overlooked in their years of formal education, you would offer the new grads.

Watch everything. Listen to everyone. Believe nothing—especially if it comes from within your media organization. Make peace (if not friends) with math. I was shocked to realize that the most useful courses from college were during my "wasted year" as an accounting major. Take a community-college course in double-entry book-keeping and another in basic statistics. Learn your way around spreadsheets and databases. Math literacy is useful to truth-tellers in two big ways: 1) You will find ways to anchor your stories with lives saved or dollars wasted; 2) a head for numbers produces a nose for bullshit. Write from your heart, but use your head. Don't sleep with a source. Colleagues are okay, but keep to sub-Casanova levels. Journalists do gossip, after all. —*Ex-Hack*

WITH WELL OVER A THOUSAND WINE BLOGS VYING TO BE HEARD, SPENCER Bailey, in "Everyone's the Wine Expert," explored the new standards for writing about wine today, and the comments poured in.

There is an immense difference between a "reviewer" and a "critic," and I personally find any mislabeling, lack of distinction, or neglect thereof on the part of the journalist egregious. This isn't to say these two types of contributors do not benefit the fields they serve in positive or impressionable ways; but only to clarify that I cannot help but feel a sense of deception otherwise. —*Aaron B.*

There's more than enough room for both types of media. The old way may be losing traction to the bloggers, but it will take years for all of this to be figured out. And it's certainly true that many of the new so-called experts are only experts because they say they are; it's also just as true that, to paraphrase Jeff LeFevre, there have been, and still are many, from the old guard who don't know shit about their subject matter either. No harm can come from either. It's only wine, after all. —*Todd Wernstrom*

The single most powerful influencer for wine purchases is a trusted recommendation. Wine blogs and other print pub reviews can provide good guidance if you trust the writer's palate and are on a mission to track down a specific wine. However, I think we are evolving to an environment where decision assistance will be delivered at the point of purchase. And by this I don't necessarily mean consulting my iPhone for reviews via one of many apps, but rather being able to post questions in real time and get trusted recommendations back from your friends and trusted sources. I see a system evolving where I can post a specific choice A versus choice B to a live feed on Cellartracker.com or via Twitter and have someone weigh in on which wine on the list in front of me has the acid profile I want to match my meal. It sounds completely nerdy perhaps, but I've done it, and I've helped others who have posted similar questions.

I'd love some comment on how we look past the source of a review and toward how we as consumers and producers can grow and utilize these networks of trusted opinion. —*Alan Baker*



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THANK YOU



June), was one of the best and most inspiring articles I've read lately. Kudos to Shapiro for creating a three-dimensional vision of a relatively unsung hero to writers, history and military buffs, and to the true and rare journalists, who only want to tell the truth.

L. Evans
Cottonwood, AZ

A fine article, and thanks for the small details that add so much to my understanding of Cornelius Ryan. When I was in high school, I first read his posthumously published memoir *A Private Battle* and was captivated by his writing style as well as the force and great charm of his personality. That's one book I can say, without reservation or sentimentality, changed the course of my life.

Ann Keefer
Philadelphia, PA

The New Ecosystem

Re: "The New Investigators" by Jill Drew (CJR, May/June 2010). The new nonprofit, investigative-journalism ecosystem is indeed alive and well at local, state, national, and international levels. The Center for Public Integrity, currently with a staff of forty, is celebrating its twentieth anniversary this year, and there have never been so many partnership and collaboration opportunities. In just the last few months, our partnerships on projects have included NPR, BBC, ABC, CNN, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *60 Minutes*, *The Wall Street Journal*, Politico, AP, Reuters, The Huffington Post, and many others. Our International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (one hundred investigative journalists in fifty countries) has also been working on cross-border investigations that are routinely published around the world. High-quality investigative work does reach a wide audience. Our Campus Assault project, discussed in the article, had a total audience of some 40 million—the number of people who read, heard, saw, watched, downloaded, tweeted, or otherwise touched our reports in part or in full. That is the new ecosystem, as Chuck Lewis properly calls it.

Bill Buzenberg
Executive Director
Center for Public Integrity
Washington, DC

Whose Supplement?

The *Columbia Journalism Review* deserves a notable Dart for ambiguity and nondisclosure in the magazine's twelve-page supplement from The Commonwealth Fund titled "What Will Happen Under Health Reform—and What's Next?" (CJR, May/June).

A reference to CJR was in smallish type at the top of the first page: "Supplement to the May/June 2010 issue of the *Columbia Journalism Review*." Are we to understand that "supplement" is a euphemism for "advertisement"? I can see why an advertiser would prefer to avoid the less lofty word, especially in pages filled with editorial content. But shouldn't we expect better of a magazine devoted to raising journalistic standards?

I'd suggest that CJR let readers in on the information they had a right to know in the first place. Did CJR's editors have any role in putting together those twelve pages? If so, what was that role? If not, why the avoidance of truth-in-labeling words like "paid" and "advertisement"?

And if the twelve-page supplement was strictly advertising, then can any well-heeled outfit buy itself a supplement to the *Columbia Journalism Review*? Are there any editorial standards applied to such advertising, and if so, what are they?

By the way, this particular supplement from The Commonwealth Fund, while fact-filled, was hardly free of arguable judgments. Its "Conclusion" lauded the new federal health-reform law as "a pragmatic approach," and offered these final words: "It will lay the foundation for a high performance health system affording access to care for all, improved quality, and greater efficiency."

I wonder how much it would cost to challenge that conclusion with a twelve-page supplement to the *Columbia Journalism Review*.

Norman Solomon
Point Reyes Station, CA

The editors respond: Solomon has a point. Because the supplement was physically separate from the magazine—while shrink-wrapped and delivered with it—we thought it would

be clear that it was not part of the issue. And the Commonwealth Fund logo, contact information, and list of experts, we thought, made its provenance clear. Still, the word “supplement” is indeed ambiguous, and we wish we’d written “sponsored supplement.”

We were delighted to have it, by the way. It was rich in valuable research and information. As for its “arguable judgments,” we are big on free speech. If Solomon knows someone or some organization that would like to challenge the supplement’s conclusions with another sponsored supplement, we’re all ears. **CJR**

MAJOR FUNDERS for CJR and CJR.org in recent years include the Arca Foundation, The Atlantic Philanthropies, Neil Barsky, The Brunswick Group, The Cabot Family Trust, Carnegie Corporation, The Challenge Fund for Journalism, Citigroup, Nathan Cummings Foundation, The Ford Foundation, Goldman Sachs, William and Mary Greve Foundation, Kingsford Capital Management, John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, Joan Konner, David and Esther Laventhol, William Lilley III, Peter Lowy, The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Open Society Institute, James H. Ottaway Jr., Park Foundation, Peter G. Peterson Foundation, Charles H. Revson Foundation, Rockefeller Brothers Fund, Rockefeller Family Fund, Sunlight Foundation, TIAA-CREF, M & T Weiner Foundation, Winokur Family Foundation, and our readers.

EDITOR’S NOTE

MORE AWARDS! I’M HAPPY TO REPORT THAT *COLUMBIA JOURNALISM REVIEW*’s Dean Starkman and former CJR staff writer Megan Garber have each won a Mirror Award, bestowed by Syracuse University’s Newhouse School of Public Communications to honor the year’s best reporting and writing on the media.

Starkman won in the Best In-Depth Piece, Traditional Media category, for his May/June 2009 article “Power Problem,” about the business media’s complacency in the years leading up to the financial meltdown. (That piece was also part of the reason CJR took home this year’s Bart Richards Award for Media Criticism, given in May by Penn State’s College of Communications.) Garber won in the Best Single Article, Digital Media category, for her article “Common Knowledge,” which is part of “Press Forward: Dialogues on the Future of News,” a series of essays and conversations on CJR.org.

Craig Silverman, CJR’s “Regret the Error” columnist, and Justin Peters, CJR’s managing editor/Web, were also finalists at the June 10 Mirror Awards luncheon in New York: Silverman in the Best Commentary, Digital Media category, and Peters for Best Profile, Digital Media (profiles plural, actually; he was a finalist for two different articles). A word about Peters: he recruited the excellent Silverman to CJR, and he conceived and co-wrote the substantial Press Forward series, with Garber, whom he edited regularly (Megan has moved to the Nieman Journalism Lab). And he writes beautifully, online and in print (see page 51). Maybe we’ll get some heavy glass and fashion him an award of our own.

I’d also like to tell you about a changing of the guard here: each July, the *Columbia Journalism Review* welcomes two new assistant editors, hired from the ranks of the graduating class of Columbia’s Graduate School of Journalism, for a one-year stint. This year we are delighted to have landed two of the top students in the class, Lauren Kirchner and Joel Meares, for the upcoming twelve months. Watch for their bylines, online and in print.

The bittersweet part of this guard changing is that we also say goodbye to the current pair of assistant editors, Greg Marx and Alexandra Fenwick, who are finishing a stellar year. Ali switched to the news-innovation beat when Garber left, and did a fine job; she also handled Darts & Laurels on the print side, and brought nuance and complexity to that page. Greg will be sorely missed. He covered the coverage of politics and policy, and did it with fresh insights and great energy. He also pitched in with enthusiasm on anything we asked of him, including editing the Currents section for print. Both are great fun to work with, too, and we’ll miss them.

—Mike Hoyt

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7.19-7.23: ONLINE

“Unlocking Financial Statements,” with University of Kansas journalism professor Jimmy Gentry.

8.9-8.13: ONLINE

“How to Be an Entrepreneur as a Business Journalist,” with freelancer Maya Smart and “Ask the Recruiter” blogger Joe Grimm.

9.01: SAN FRANCISCO

“Engage Your Community to Power Your Business Coverage,” with John A. Byrne, former editor-in-chief of BusinessWeek.com; David Cohn, founder of Spot.U.S.; and Robin J. Phillips, managing editor of BusinessJournalism.org.

9.14: ONLINE

“Develop Business Angles on Any Beat,” with Phillips and Chad Graham, social media editor for The Arizona Republic.

10.02: NEW YORK

“Produce a Business News Video in a Day,” with Arizona State University TV-production specialist Brian Snyder.

10.11: ATLANTA

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Currents



Overruled Sir David Eady, England's most influential libel judge, issued a damning ruling in the libel suit that made science journalist Simon Singh an icon to reformers. Singh won on appeal.

Is the End Nigh?

Journalists have been whinging about England's libel laws—which notoriously place the burden of proof on defendants, lack a strong defense for fair commentary or writing on public figures, and provide a venue for forum-shopping plaintiffs across the globe—for generations. But efforts at reform, like the parliamentary committees of 1948, 1975, and 1991, have produced only tweaks. ¶ So skeptics can be forgiven for doubting that anything will come of a similar parliamentary report issued this winter. But across Britain, there's a growing consensus that the law has become a

national shame and a chill on public debate. Just a few years ago, not one major party included a call for libel reform in its platform. This spring, all three did.

What accounts for the transformation? International pressure, in part. In 2008, the United Nations Human Rights Committee concluded that Britain's laws discouraged "critical media reporting on matters of serious public interest" and warned of a danger to "freedom of expression worldwide" in the Internet

age. Meanwhile, laws have been passed in four U.S. states to protect Americans from adverse judgments in England—a "humiliation for our system," the most recent parliamentary report acknowledged.

Another catalyst was Simon Singh, a best-selling science journalist. In 2008, Singh published a column in *The Guardian* asserting there was "not a jot of evidence" behind the British Chiropractic Association's claim that spinal manipulation is an effective treatment for childhood colic, ear infections, or asthma. He was sued for libel, and *The Guardian* told him it couldn't afford to fight. But earnings from his popular books hadn't left Singh defenseless. "I could see no reason why I should back down," he says. "If I had the time and the resources, I had almost a responsibility."

Significantly, said Singh's lawyer, Robert Dougans, the column "wasn't a story of an MP who had fiddled his expenses a bit, or of a footballer with a prostitute. It's real science journalism about real health." That meant the ensuing legal battle provided a handy rallying point for a key new player, a coalition known as Libel Reform. Made up of the English branch of the writers' association PEN and the NGOs Index On Censorship and Sense about Science, the campaign has major support from the Open Society Institute (a CJR donor), but no formal backing from the publishing or media industries.

'Wait and see. Wait—until it's too late. That's what I generally see happening among regional and local newspaper companies. They talk about early adopters and the high cost of a state-of-the-art iPad app, and most are waiting. The big guys—what I've called the Digital Dozen—aren't waiting.'—Ken Doctor, Nieman Journalism Lab

Libel Reform built its publicity efforts and parliamentary lobbying around Singh's trial, which as it unfolded demonstrated another perversity of the law. After an adverse initial ruling, Singh prevailed on appeal in April, putting him in the roughly one-tenth of writers who successfully defend libel claims in British courts. But he spent about £200,000 of his own money, and hopes to recoup at most 80 percent. His experience illustrates how the cost of a lengthy defense—an Oxford study pegged British libel litigation at 140 times more expensive than the average in continental Europe—is a greater threat than damages under the current regime.

The reform campaign is making progress. The ruling Conservative Party and its junior partner, the Liberal Democrats, wrote a review of libel law into their coalition agreement. Meanwhile, Lord Anthony Lester, a Lib Dem peer with a track record of major legislation, has introduced a bill that Libel Reform hopes to push forward.

Given the burden he faced, says Singh, his advice to other journalists in the same situation would be, "don't fight the case." If the current effort prevails, they may not face that dilemma.

—Clint Hendler

Legal Aid

THE NEED FOR PRESS FREEDOM and government transparency is as urgent today as

ever, but the newsrooms that long defended key rights have fewer resources. A year-old externship program at Yale Law School is trying to help. The ten students in the Media Freedom and Information Access Practicum work pro bono to support journalists on issues ranging from national security to online speech to access to state and federal records, and have already represented more than a dozen clients. In May, **Rachael Scarborough King** spoke with **Jack Balkin**, Knight Professor of Constitutional Law and the First Amendment and the practicum's supervisor, and **Nabiha Syed**, a recent graduate who was one of the four founding students. A longer version of this interview is at http://www.cjr.org/behind_the_news/legal_aid.



Is this project part of a move toward nonprofit models?

JB: One of the big trends this clinic is part of is what I would call the disaggregation of the functions of the

twentieth-century newspaper. Legal clinics and NGOs that do not understand themselves to be journalistic enterprises nevertheless are engaged in litigation that



uncovers information that is of value to the public. Just as some nonprofits have taken on some of the work of investigative journalism, so too might some nonprofits take on some of the work of defending media freedoms.

How has the clinic changed from what you first envisioned?

NS: The most surprising thing is how quickly people have been willing to give us work. We have a relationship with *The New York Times*, and if you had asked me when we were starting this last year if I would help the *Times* with legal work, I would have laughed. So much is changing, and people have a need for bodies, and we have them and we're free.

Has it become more difficult for journalists to get access

HARD NUMBERS

5 million unique page views for PBS NewsHour's widget showing live video of the Gulf oil spill, as of June 14. The site's traffic tripled from the prior month.

43 percent of online adults who reported watching news videos on the Internet in 2009. Across media genres, 69 percent of online adults reported using the Web to watch or download video, up from 57 percent in 2007.

190 percent increase in videos produced by a cross-section of newspaper publishers for online distribution between the first quarter of 2009 and the first quarter of 2010

80,421 downloads of *Wired's* iPad application, priced at \$4.99, as of June 9—a figure comparable to the magazine's average monthly newsstand sales

50 price, in dollars, Gannett is charging a key advertiser for one thousand impressions on its *USA Today* iPad app—about five times the CPM rate for regular Web ads, and about half the rate of a full-page color ad in print

5 million e-books downloaded to Apple's new iPad as of June 7, meaning the product accounted for 22 percent of the e-book market within two months of its launch

36 percent of newspaper executives, when asked in a recent survey what they would do differently given the chance, who said that their organization should have invested more in new media, technology, and the Internet a decade ago. The second most common reply, at 30 percent, was to charge for content.

PBS NewsHour, Pew Internet and American Life Project, Brightcove Inc., *Wired*, The AP, Mashable, Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism

to information?

JB: We're in the middle of building out what I call a national surveillance state, which is a state that does the work of government by analyzing and collecting information. We need to find out what kind of information the government is collecting, how it's collecting it, whether it's abusing its privileges or not. At the same time, there is a natural bureaucratic tendency to resist inspection. So it wouldn't be surprising that governments would become a little stingier.

Do you see drawbacks to taking this type of work out of the newsroom?

JB: I can think of advantages. An NGO might be able to defend some interests that a major metropolitan newspaper would regard as secondary. It might be willing to do FOIA work that the paper wouldn't invest in because it's time-consuming and expensive. The sum of their work might in fact better approximate the public interest.

NS: I hope we don't replace a lawyer in the newsroom who has a personal relationship.

We can help where people don't have other options, or they're priced out of other options, or they have don't have time for them.

Bold Move

LAST FALL, A NEW, CITY-mag-style Web site quietly planted its flag in the crowded San Francisco blogosphere. There was no launch party, no ad campaign, just an eye-catching design and a single, first-person story about weird exercise classes on offer in the Bay Area. A few days later, another story, about a bike-thief stakeout. By the end of its first month, The Bold Italic had also tackled the how-to of street musicianship and the etiquette of a strip-club visit.

But despite the eclectic approach, one topic seems too touchy for the site to address directly: its ownership. The Bold Italic is a Gannett experiment, led by Michael Maness, the company's vice president of innovation and design. But Maness's name is absent from the site, and Gannett's is mentioned only once—buried in the 3,000-word terms of service. (Full disclosure: the site I work at,

Bundle.com, has had conversations about collaborating with The Bold Italic on an editorial project.)

Keeping quiet about the site's lineage is a strategic move. Gannett is still a traditional company; its family-friendly newspapers are not likely to use the word "tranny" or end a story about marijuana dispensaries with helpful local listings, as The Bold Italic does. And while the arm's-length approach allows Gannett to maintain its squeaky reputation, The Bold Italic is free of association with its stodgy parent. As Jim Goss, an analyst who covers Gannett for Barrington Research, says, "Sometimes it's good not to tie a new project to something that's perceived as a challenged brand."

And this is a new project (it's still in beta), with a new function—to "help people be better locals," according to Maness—and an upbeat tone. Maness found that readers are frustrated with journalism's claims of objectivity and its focus on corruption, crime, and disasters. So Bold Italic stories are written in the first person, and the

site doesn't cover bad news. "People want to feel good about where they live," Maness says. The site's freelance writers aren't necessarily trained journalists. "We don't even call it journalism," he says, preferring to talk about "storytelling" and "narrative."

The sunny, service-oriented approach carries over to the business model, which depends on listings and targeted ads. A black tab on the side of the screen functions as a "clipbook," where readers can bookmark events and businesses that interest them; that information will "help match merchants with potential customers who share their passions," according to the site's About Us section. (Maness didn't offer specifics about Gannett's investment or financial targets, but says the site is generating money "in fits and starts," and added, "We're patient for quick profit, but we're impatient for early revenue.")

While the implications of product placement may make traditionalists nervous, early reviews have been flattering. The Webby awards gave the site an honorable mention, and tech blog Gizmodo complimented its iPad app. And traffic, though modest—a big story might approach 20,000 page views—is growing.

Jim Hopkins, a former *USA Today* journalist who runs a blog about Gannett from his San Francisco home, says he likes the writing and the tone. But more than that, Hopkins says, "I like it because it's Gannett. They've historically been so timid, and this is nothing you'd ever see in a Gannett product, period." For this exercise in anti-branding, that is, perhaps, the first mark of success.

—Janet Paskin

LANGUAGE CORNER HONING PIGEONS?

Write LanguageCorner@cjr.org

LET'S HOME IN ON A PROBLEM: THE MISUSE OF "HONE IN" TO MEAN "ZERO IN." WHEN you "zero in" or "home in" on something, you're seeking and finding the goal. "Hone" means "to sharpen," as in "hone a knife." But "hone" sounds a lot like "home," and since you're "sharpening" your focus when you "home in" on something... well, you can see how this mistake happens.

The misuse was first spotted in 1965, and seems to have exploded in the past few years. Such luminaries as Jay Leno and CJR have been caught using it.

Merriam-Webster's Dictionary of English Usage, published in 1994, says "it may be that eventually *hone in on* will become so common that dictionaries will begin to enter it as a standard phrase; and usage commentators will then routinely rail against it as an ignorant corruption of the language." That day may be nigh. The more recent *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* says "hone in" "seems to have established itself in American English," though it adds, "your use of it especially in writing is likely to be called a mistake." *Garner's Modern American Usage* says that its use is "commonplace even among many well-educated people," but something "to avoid" in "careful usage." Careful writers will hone their cursors, so that seldom will be heard this discouraging word.

—Merrill Perlman



DART

On Valentine's Day weekend in 2003, a gang of Italian thieves, led by a man named Leonardo Notarbartolo, broke into the Diamond Center, a vault in Antwerp, Belgium. Using items like Styrofoam, a dustmop handle, and hairspray, the thieves disabled a state-of-the-art security system that included infrared heat, motion, and light sensors, as well as a lock with 100 million possible combinations. Police say at least \$100 million in diamonds went missing in the biggest diamond heist ever.

But the thieves made a mistake. While hightailing it back to Italy, they tossed bags of garbage containing receipts, loose gems, and other incriminating information into a stretch of Belgian forest routinely patrolled by a retiree on the lookout for litterbugs. The garbage cracked the case. Four of the thieves were convicted, including Notarbartolo, who got ten years.

It sounded like a Hollywood movie. And soon it will be. Notarbartolo gave an interview last year to *Wired* contributing editor Joshua Davis for a magazine story that has since been optioned and is currently being produced by J.J. Abrams for Paramount Pictures.

Davis's jailhouse interview with Notarbartolo, published in March 2009, introduced an exciting new twist. According to Notarbartolo, he didn't mastermind the Diamond Center caper. He was in Antwerp to fence other stolen jewelry, and was approached by a diamond dealer who wanted the vault robbed in order to collect insurance. Notarbartolo said his backer built a replica of the light-sensitive vault—a detail straight out of the movie *Ocean's Eleven*, to which this heist has been compared—so the thieves could memorize its dimensions and do the job in the dark.

On the night of the break-in, he said, the thieves stole what they thought were bags full of diamonds, only to open them later and discover they were largely empty—a double-cross. Nearly everyone with gems in the vault had removed them, Notarbartolo claimed, presumably in order to join the insurance scam.

Dramatic stuff. The only problem, according to Belgian police and others with knowledge of the case, is that it's not true. Greg Campbell and Scott Andrew Selby devote an entire chapter in *Flawless: Inside the Largest Diamond Heist in History*, their recent and meticulously reported book about the theft, to debunking Notarbartolo's account. The evidence marshaled by the authors is considerable.

One example: when a security guard discovered the crime scene, the lights were blazing and a pile of ransacked bags and other containers, as well as distinctive jewels and other

items like credit cards and passports, which might leave a trail, were piled on the floor. Black electrical tape covered the light sensor. Clearly, darkness wasn't a factor, and the thieves had gone through the loot in the vault.

A reader of the *Wired* article, though, would not know about this or any of the contradictions between Notarbartolo's story and what the police found. Instead, Davis simply included a series of hedges at the end, suggesting that his storyteller could be lying, posing questions like, "Is Notarbartolo's story a decoy to throw suspicion on others?" Davis says his article was never meant to be a straightforward presentation of the facts of the case. Rather, as *Wired* editor Mark Robinson put it, "Our approach—telling the story from Notarbartolo's point of view—was entirely valid considering that it had never been heard before."

Agim De Bruycker, one of the lead detectives on the case, told CJR he met with Davis several times prior to Davis's jailhouse interview with Notarbartolo. But he said Davis never made an effort to check Notarbartolo's story with him or his partner, Patrick Peys. "Not one detail of Leo's story can be confirmed by the facts in the investigation," De Bruycker said. Davis's explanation? "I did not ask for the police point of view on the story as I directly explored the reasons why Notarbartolo might lie, an exploration that was informed by my [earlier] conversations with the police."

Is that good enough? We don't think so. Without giving readers, who come to the story without any context, at least a glimpse of the police version of events—beyond the obvious caveat that the storyteller was a known thief and liar—the article gets too close to qualified stenography. Even some of *Wired's* readers knew dereliction of journalistic duty when they saw it. "Who, exactly, is supposed to be fooled by this silly tale?" read one letter to the editor. For this, *Wired* earns a DART.

In an interesting epilogue, about four months after his early release from jail last spring, Notarbartolo was pulled over in Milan, where police found a kilogram of diamonds stuffed between the seats of his car. He said they were low-quality industrial grade diamonds purchased in 2008 (odd, since he was in jail that year); nothing like the highly valuable stones that would have been stored in the Antwerp Diamond vault. But according to the Belgian police, the diamonds have been inspected by experts who determined that they were indeed of the highest quality.

Moreover, these diamonds, about \$80,000-worth, may be connected to the heist, a source told CJR. According to the source, the stones await an Italian court's permission to be brought back to Belgium, a factual detail that seems compelling enough to fold in to the movie. But don't look for it in a theater near you. **CJR**

A World of Trouble

Who's a journalist? In today's war zones, the answer matters.

IN NOVEMBER 2008, THE PAKISTANI ARMY LAUNCHED ITS FIRST MAJOR OFFENSIVE against militants in the tribal areas of the country. I was working as a reporter for *The Christian Science Monitor* and had arrived in the border town of Peshawar from Islamabad, prepared to enter the war zone with a military unit as an embedded journalist. It was not an ideal arrangement, and I expected nothing more than a sloppily choreographed dog-and-pony show that would showcase cooperation with the U.S. military aims. But reporters were barred from entering the war zone, and this was the only way to get in legally. It also meant a close, if carefully managed, look at the battlefield. After weeks of wrangling, I had a green light from the military, and I thought that little could go wrong.

Then it went wrong in a manner I had not even considered. When I arrived in Peshawar, my fixer told me he'd heard that the Taliban in the tribal areas had kidnapped a Canadian woman. Over the next few hours, I pieced together from rumors and half-baked accounts that she was a freelance reporter of some sort. I didn't recognize her name, but I gathered that in spite of many warnings by local journalists, she had decided to travel alone into the heart of Taliban country to shoot a documentary.

I called my contact in the Pakistan intelligence agency, the ISI, with whom I had arranged my embed. It was immediately evident that the tone had changed. The colonel, who had been reluctant but helpful so far, was no longer in the mood to accommodate my professional requests. Had I heard about this Canadian woman? he asked. I told him that I had. Did I know her? I did not.

As we spoke, a few things became clear: first, the colonel was not convinced that the woman was a legitimate journalist. He didn't go so far as to accuse of her being a spy or a collaborator with the insurgents, but he did wonder out loud why she was not on anyone's radar if she was working in Pakistan as a reporter. Second, he was somehow holding me—and all English-language journalists—responsible for making his job more difficult. Third, he was going to make sure I paid for the PR nightmare that was already unfolding for him with the Canadian government. "We're not taking in any reporters," he said, and hung up before I could get in a full sentence.

The Canadian, Khadija Abdul Qahaar (formerly Beverly Anne Giesbrecht), was fifty-five years old at the time of her kidnapping. Two years later, she is still in captivity. She was a one-person news organization, the publisher of *Jihadunspun.com*, a Web site dedicated to chronicling what Qahaar viewed as a war against Muslims waged by America in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. By venturing alone into the

tribal areas, she had obviously put her life in danger. She had also screwed up my story and, after speaking with the colonel, I realized that she had eroded, however slightly, the reputation of the entire foreign press corps covering the war. Qahaar's abduction left many of us foreign correspondents feeling that we had to be extra careful, extra cooperative with the authorities to make up for a major gaffe by someone who was supposed to be "one of us."

As frustrated as I was, I found it difficult to blame Qahaar completely. For more than a year, I had worked in Pakistan as a freelance reporter. I had only weeks earlier become a full-time correspondent and "legal"—eligible to obtain a coveted press pass. I knew all too well that for a freelancer in a war zone, bold (and even reckless) moves—such as the one made by Qahaar—often seem like the only way to get attention, and a paycheck. As a freelancer I too had traveled into the tribal areas with nothing more than a notepad, a camera, and a young fixer by my side. With Pakistan now in an all-out war, nowhere was particularly safe. My closest calls had actually come in Pakistan's largest city, Karachi, when the former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto returned from exile. A bomb exploded in the middle of a massive procession that I was covering, killing nearly one hundred and fifty people. There were dozens of foreign freelanc-



Captive Shane Bauer, one of three U.S. citizens arrested last year in Iran, with his mother during her visit in May.

ers operating from Pakistan during this time, and most of them, at some point, had done something foolish in search of a story. Qahaar's misfortune was that she got caught.

Today, western freelance reporters of all stripes are spread across not just Pakistan but Iraq, Afghanistan, Africa, and Latin America, reporting on the most violent conflicts in the world. War zones have become the training ground for some of the greenest reporters, a way to break into a U.S. news business that has dramatically reduced its footprint in the world, shuttering bureaus and calling correspondents home. For newsrooms with shrunken budgets, freelancers in far-flung hotspots are a godsend. They

tend to be young and hungry and, more to the point, cost a fraction of what staff reporters do. They don't have to be insured; they don't require business cards or press passes or Kevlar vests or hostile-environment training.

This situation is not new. The retreat from foreign coverage has been under way for at least twenty years, and intrepid freelancers have long set off without institutional backing to try to make their own professional breaks. But what is different now is that the financial health of most news outlets has become so dire that their use of—and in some cases reliance on—such lone-wolf reporters has become the norm rather than the exception. Advances in digital

technology, meanwhile, have enabled a new breed of citizen journalist to wander in search of a scoop—or stumble upon one—publishing on their own Web sites and on their own terms. The result is that while not long ago we would have expected a star reporter like Christiane Amanpour to provide the defining reportage from a violent post-election Iran, today it is raw camera-phone video footage of a young woman bleeding to death in the streets of Tehran that defines a moment in history. The people who uploaded this video of Neda Agha-Soltan were awarded a Polk award, one of journalism's highest honors.

Some freelancers have capitalized on the new reality to produce impor-

tant coverage and establish themselves as serious journalists. Chris Albritton, for instance, translated his fearless and incisive freelance war reporting into a bureau chief position with Reuters. Michael Yon, another freelance war reporter who became popular for his coverage of fighting in Iraq, published a book and caught the attention of Bruce Willis, who expressed interest in making a movie based on Yon's experiences.

But given the range of people who roam the world's volatile regions—from academics doing research to tourists with blogs and digital cameras—it isn't surprising that we periodically hear the alarming news of freelance journalists—or someone with a camera who may or may not consider himself a journalist—getting into trouble. The imprisonment of Iranian-American journalist Roxana Saberi by the Iranian government was only the most publicized of recent cases. Shane Bauer, one of the American “hikers” arrested months later in Iran on charges of spying, has also been described as “a published journalist who reported from Darfur, Yemen and Iraq,” and whose “insightful commentaries have covered issues not tackled by the

The upshot is that there is real confusion over who is a journalist in a war zone, and that confusion can cause problems for professional journalists as they try to do the already difficult work of covering conflict. But me having a trip into the tribal areas scuttled, and having to work overtime to mend my inherently fraught relationships with the Pakistani military, are minor irritations compared to the very real possibility that this confusion can be exploited for political gain. And the problem is not simply a matter of foreign governments looking to control the western media, or gain a propaganda edge. The more serious signs of trouble are coming from home.

In January, Major General Michael T. Flynn, the top U.S. intelligence official in Afghanistan, published a report calling for an overhaul of intelligence-gathering operations. Drawing parallels to how sports reporters gauge the chances of teams winning in the National Football League, Flynn expressed the need for intelligence assets who would “retrieve information from the ground level and make it available to a broader audience, similar to the way journalists work.”

The confusion over who is a journalist in a war zone can cause problems for actual journalists that go beyond safety concerns—it can be exploited, by the U.S. military and others, for strategic and political gain.

mainstream media.” These arrests in Iran came on the heels of the imprisonment of two Asian-American journalists in North Korea, and in the following months many freelancers also ended up in jails while covering the post-election upheaval in Iran and the war in Sri Lanka. And then there are those under-reported stories, like Nicole Tung, the twenty-three-year-old college graduate (and journalism major) who was picked up by Pakistani intelligence agents last December as she wandered in the tribal areas armed with a camera, working as a freelance photographer.

In the footnotes, he was even more pointed: “Analysts need not come solely from the intelligence community.... Seasoned print journalists who have been laid off in the current industry retrenchment, and who want to serve their country in Afghanistan, might be a source of talent....”

Then in March, *The New York Times* broke news that a Defense Department official, Michael D. Furlong, had “set up a network of private contractors in Afghanistan and Pakistan to help track and kill suspected militants.” One of the subcontractors, a freelance jour-

nalist, told the *Times* “that the government hired him to gather information about Afghanistan and that Mr. Furlong improperly used his work.” The freelancer felt cheated. “We were providing information so they could better understand the situation in Afghanistan, and it was being used to kill people,” he told the *Times*.

Clearly, the American news media aren't the only ones moving to a freelance model for information gathering. The military and editors in New York are in some cases drawing on the same talent pool. Under such circumstances, the ambiguity surrounding journalists in war zones—to say nothing of the under-employed nature of journalists generally—suits the military just fine. But it is bad news for American journalism. It makes the days when the industry wrung its hands over the military's embedding program look ideal by comparison—at least as embeds journalists maintained the institutional integrity of the press, even while riding on the military's jeep.

It also makes the Pakistani colonel's insinuation that Qahaar had a “secret agenda,” and the allegations of espionage that have been hung on nearly every kidnapped or arrested journalist in recent memory, much more troubling—not because I suddenly believe those charges have merit, but because there is now something concrete for the folks doing the kidnapping and arresting to use to justify their claims.

It is useful to remember that the term “freelancer” was first used for mercenaries who lent their martial skills and services to the highest bidder in time of war. In the current environment, the following scenario is certainly plausible: a freelance journalist, strapped for cash and with no institutional affiliations or loyalty, embeds herself with a unit of freelance warriors from the Blackwater army. Together, they ride into a war zone, all freelancers, with indeterminate missions and no one to vet whatever “journalism” gets committed. Things have never looked quite so eerily uncertain. **CJR**

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The Trouble With Experts

The Web allows us to question authority in new ways

ACTRESS JENNY MCCARTHY'S FAVORITE LINE IS, "MY SON IS MY SCIENCE." SHE'S an autism activist who insists that vaccines caused her son's neurological disorder, a claim that has near-zero support in scientific literature. Years ago, she might have been dismissed as another irrational celebrity or passionate crank. But in the brave new world of "experts" online, McCarthy is more than that. In some corners of the world, she defines a debate, blotting out scientists who completely debunk her claims.

And then there's Orac, McCarthy's opposite number. Orac is the *nom de blog* of someone who writes that he is a "surgeon/scientist." He's another self-appointed autism expert but, unlike McCarthy, Orac *attacks* the vaccines-cause-autism set. He recently delighted in the downfall of a telegenic anti-vaccine doctor in England, for example, who finally lost his license. We, the audience, don't know who Orac *really* is, although he has taken on a leading role as a debunker of the autism-vaccine link.

As long as I can remember, "the expert" arrived through news articles, inevitably a guy at that smart-sounding think tank, a famed professor of social science, a renowned author. The expert quote arrived toward the second half of most pieces, wafting out of some glorified institution, as iconic and predictable as Colonel Mustard in the board game Clue.

Structurally, the expert quote is supposed to act as the inarguable voice of reason, getting rid of any doubt left in our minds or splitting the difference between extremes. As the poet Philip Larkin writes of such voices, "Ah, solving that question / Brings the priest and the doctor / In their long coats / Running over the fields."

But the mystique around expertise has always troubled those who bothered to think about it. The philosopher John Dewey expressed irritation over the unquestioned expert a long time ago, chiding that experts were but "a class" with "private interests and private knowledge." As the British critic Adam Phillips writes in his book on the nature of expertise, *Terrors and Experts*, expertise carries with it some troubled assumptions—that "because a person has done a recognizable or legitimated official training they are then qualified to claim something more than that they have done the training." Phillips points out that it is almost always a feeling of uncertainty that drives the non-specialist—the reader, the patient, the investor—into the arms of experts.

For journalists, this uncertainty is at the center of every traditional news story. Journalists have long gathered expert quotes, secretly hoping to have our angles confirmed and our fears of imposture put to rest. But also because many journalists believe there's a Platonic truth out there, a definable explanation for everything

under the sun—and the experts can tell us what that is.

But with the rise of the Web, as well as changing ideas of authority in general, "the expert" has come to mean something different from what it once did. There's the rise of what the Brits call "experts by experience"—people like Jenny McCarthy, and also like Orac—who have emerged online because they write well and/or frequently on their subjects, rather than becoming an expert by acclamation of other experts or because of an affiliation with a venerated institution. The worst part of all of this is the thicket of false expertise available on the Web, mistaken by Google-search enthusiasts or, sometimes, naïve reporters, as real expertise. These *fauxperts* are not entirely new, but not many years ago they had a somewhat harder time getting their point of view presented as coming from an "expert."

This change in the way we think about expertise stems from a few sources. The first is a weakened trust in institutions or companies or government. Some contend this started in the 1980s and 90s, though, as measured by the Edelman Trust Barometer, trust took a serious dip in 2007. The second is due to what Net brainiacs call "disintermediation," or the disappearance, due to the Web, of the grinning middlemen who previously connected one institution to another. In the case of journalism, a perfect example of "disintermediation" is that experts used to be mediated and selected by journalists, but now experts themselves may well present their expertise online, like Orac, or the twenty-three-year-old hurricane blogger Brendan Loy, a self-described "weather nerd" in Indiana who predicted Hurricane Katrina days before it occurred, yet another "expert" emerging from the crowd without the usual vetting or filtering.

THIS IS A TWO-SIDED THING. ON ONE hand, it's great that an expert can go straight to the people. On the other, if that expert is an autism-vaccine connector or a climate-skeptic blogger like Anthony Watts, whose claims have been disputed by scientists, it's pretty clear that mediation is needed. But who should the mediator be?

Dave Winer, a visiting scholar at New

York University's Arthur L. Carter Journalism Institute, would say no one. He has argued that experts and amateurs with expert-level knowledge should go directly to readers rather than relying on journalists as mediators. He calls it "Sources Go Direct." (So direct that Winer dislikes being quoted by journalists, as an expert or otherwise.) "The sources who no longer trust the journals, or aren't being called by them... are going direct," he has written. "This is what replaces journalism." I see Winer's logic. If people want expert opinions on film, they might well look to the Internet Movie Database's flock of amateur reviewers. These IMDBers are true film buffs. Their often expansive, obsessive reviews should be part of a new definition of expertise, a place beyond the ordered (and American-centered) ornamental gardens of *New Yorker* reviews.

I spoke to some people who are trying to make sense of this dilemma—call them *experts on expertise or institutional authorities on the end of institutionalized authority*—and they were helpful, as

stance. Nicco Mele, who once ran Howard Dean's Internet campaign and is a lecturer at Harvard's Kennedy School, sounded happy when he said that "classic institutions are fading as arbiters of expert reputations" and Google, Twitter, and Facebook are taking their place.

But Dave Cohn, the founder of Spot.us, had a more complicated take. A Web community may revolt against traditional experts and anoint its own, based on a different criterion of expertise, he says. But this Web community can be even more capricious in how long a person gets to be a community expert. It can "redact a positive opinion of you. It's sort of like getting fired," says Cohn.

I expected Jonathan Zittrain, author of *The Future of the Internet And How to Stop It* and a professor at Harvard Law School (Harvard expert, natch!), to be another specialist who might support specialists going direct. But Zittrain also expressed a concern over the unsorted expertise on the Web. That problem is the "epistemological paralysis," as he put it, or the entropy that sets in when

WHEN JOURNALISTS ARE GENERALISTS, they rely, often uncritically, on outside experts for specialized thinking. They are famously able to immerse themselves in a fresh subject and report back. But they carry with them their ignorance of the area's debates and politics. Hyper-specialization of most subject areas has made this guileless, mediating journalistic model somewhat uncomfortable.

But maybe journalists can get better at locating experts. "Journalists have to understand the difference between expertise and authority, and to question the categories," says Clay Shirky, a professor at New York University's Interactive Telecommunications Program and author of *Cognitive Surplus*. He offers a dark example: "A lawyer knows just as much the day after he is disbarred as the day before, but his authoritative status has changed. Journalists need to separate credential-based expertise from actual authority." Journalists might "try for a richer set of calculations" about authority, Shirky suggests.

By abandoning the assumption that gold-plated credentials equal expertise, the press might even change history. Could journalists have helped to take down, say, Bernie Madoff, before the feds did if they had questioned the SEC's experts more? Shirky wonders.

And then there's the chance that authentic experts (not necessarily credentialed experts) could become journalists of some kind. It's happening already. Take the flock of professor-bloggers masticating the news on the Foreign Policy Web site or economist bloggers like Tyler Cowen. There are journalists who have become experts via either peer or crowd review—like Laurie Garrett, a reporter who focused on public health and foreign policy until she became a Senior Fellow for Global Health at the Council on Foreign Relations, or the omnipresent Nate Silver, who combines his knowledge of polls and statistics with a journalistic role as generalist information curator with star-making aplomb. To cheaply paraphrase Isaiah Berlin, journalists can't all be clever hedgehogs, but perhaps some generalist foxes can start growing some quills. **CJR**

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'Journalists have to understand the difference between expertise and authority,' says Clay Shirky. 'A lawyer knows just as much the day after he is disbarred as the day before, but his authoritative status has changed.'

experts often are. Most of these people were interested in making more space for a kind of expert-journalist who improves upon our previous incarnation as jolly generalist. (For an insightful essay on the need for journalists to report their way toward their own expertise, search for Brent Cunningham's "Re-thinking Objectivity" on cjr.org, and fork over the \$1.99 to download it.)

I imagined that many of the up-to-the-minute digital journo types I knew would cast a cold eye on experts and the need for journalists as intermediaries, choosing Web-enabled amateurs over the authorities that have so damaged themselves in the last decade—the experts championing failing wars, for in-

we aren't guided by filtering voices on the Web—what others have called "filter failure." One unsatisfactory cure to this problem is the emergence of filtering voices that only speak to the most fragmented audiences—"getting silo-ed," as Chris Mooney, the science blogger and co-author of *Unscientific America*, put it, or "broken into little partisan herds."

"A reader wants some trusted source to break it down for her: a domain expert with a blog and a Rolodex, who happens to be eager to draw upon further experts," says Zittrain. "Cacophony cries out for intermediaries, to hold politicians accountable or to give readers the sense of an environment that they can't personally see or touch."

Message Control

Is Obama's White House tighter than Bush's?

ON MARCH 4, PRESIDENT OBAMA SAT BEHIND HIS STOUT OAK DESK, FLANKED by beaming lawmakers, and, wielding a pen for the cameras, signed the Travel Promotion Act into law. Just a routine White House moment, right?

Maybe not. The images from which I—and others in the press—recreated that scene were captured by government employees. The White House released a photo to the world and produced a slick video that would have looked right at home on the evening news. No journalist was present for the bill signing because none were invited.

The bill, which passed Congress with overwhelming bipartisan support, had the anodyne goal of luring foreign tourist dollars to these shores. Not so controversial. But the ceremony was just one recent example of an unsettling trend of limiting press access to major events at the White House, from the Dalai Lama's visit to the odd do-over of Obama's flubbed attempt to take the oath of office.

Despite the administration's trumpeting of its record on transparency—not to mention its use of the issue as a campaign cudgel—on the whole reporters have found this White House to be no different than the Bush administration (or any other recent administration) when it comes to providing information or being accessible to the press. “By and large, they’re just like all of their predecessors,” says CBS Radio correspondent Mark Knoller, who has covered every president since Gerald Ford. “They give us information that serves their interests more than our interests.”

Message control is central to every administration, and it would have been naïve to expect much else. But the Obama White House has actually regressed in some troubling ways. For instance, Obama has been far less available for questioning by journalists than even President Bush, who was openly contemptuous of the press. And accommodations on off-the-record background briefings and White House photo releases—both forged in the wake of significant press failures in the run-up to the Iraq war—have eroded since Obama took office.

Photo releases, where shots taken by the official White House photographer are offered to news outlets, are nothing new. But photojournalists have long been irked when such photos are the only images of an event that could have easily been made public. In 2005, after an increase in presidential events from which they were excluded, the White House News Photographers Association allied with other press organizations and successfully pressed the Bush White House to routinely allow photographers back in. “We won the access under the Bush administration, and it has been taken away under the Obama administration,” says Ron Sachs, who chairs the association's advocacy committee. He pointed to a series of recent incidents, including the decision to bar photographers from Obama's February 18 meeting with the

Dalai Lama in favor of releasing a single, no-smiles still taken by Pete Souza, the official White House photographer.

It wouldn't take much to let the photographic pool into the room for half a minute, thereby producing dozens of shots for editors to choose from. Instead, the only record of official White House business is often a single frame, curated by the president's staff in accordance with the administration's message of the day.

Message control is enhanced by eliminating instances when the president is forced to answer inconvenient questions—and possibly provide inconvenient answers. Remember the very real national distraction that ensued after Obama suggested at a July 2009 press conference that the Cambridge, Massachusetts, police had “stupidly” arrested Harvard professor Henry Louis Gates Jr. at his home? That was Obama's last formal press conference after a remarkable opening string. In February, shortly after *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* published pieces pointing out the drought, Obama made a surprise half-hour visit to the briefing room. Besides that, he went without a White House press conference until late May—309 days.

For White House reporters the absence of informal opportunities to question the president is at least as galling as the dearth of formal sessions. Richard Stevenson, who covered the Bush administration for *The New York Times*, says it was routine for reporters to be allowed to ask the president questions—often several times a week—when they were ushered into the Oval Office for quick pool sprays or in other less regimented settings. “It wasn't an extensive give-and-take, but he did take questions quite frequently,” says Stevenson, now the paper's deputy Washington bureau chief. “Obama has almost completely stopped doing that.”

Some reporters credit the Obama administration with increasing access to certain subject-area experts. But often these background briefings—and others with White House staffers—come on the condition that the briefers can only be quoted as a “senior administration official” or some equally vague attribution. Here again, progress under the Bush administration has been rolled back under Obama. Controversy surrounding off-

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the-record sourcing before the Iraq war prompted news organizations to protest to the Bush administration about the frequent demands that background briefings be anonymous, and the innocuousness of some of the information conveyed this way. "They got the message, and for most of the briefings we would be able to quote people by name," says Caren Bohan, an officer in the White House Correspondents Association who has covered both administrations.

But Obama's handlers discarded the Bush-era détente. Print reporters have been particularly outraged by incidents in which background briefers went on cable news to deliver the same information, faces before the world, minutes after the background sessions.

To protest the White House's briefing policy, Stevenson and Ron Fournier of The Associated Press organized a sign-on letter from many Washington editors and bureau chiefs in May 2009. The White House responded and agreed to put more of the sessions on the record. While the situation has improved from the journalists' point of view, readers still regularly find the administration's line coming from unnamed sources. "There's at least movement in the right direction," says Stevenson. "It still is a problem. But the blatant instances where the only person who doesn't know the identity of the briefer is the reader have been reduced—but not anywhere close to eliminated."

NONE OF THIS IS THE STUFF OF NIXON'S Enemies List. But the changes have to be understood in the context of the administration's increasing use of online media to effectively create the White House's own internal news organization. It is a matter of evolution and degree. This is not the first White House to e-mail its press releases to the public. But it is the first to press back against news articles on its blog and via its press officials' Twitter feeds, to use such venues to break news, and to regularly broadcast its own video Q&A sessions, moderated by government employees, on its own Web sites.

No one expects the White House to ignore these new tools for communicating with the country. And there's nothing inherently wrong with the White House setting up online interactions between the president and the American people—

it is this very digital intimacy that fueled Obama's successful grassroots campaign, and it was predicted that, once in office, it would help the president explain his policies and rally the nation.

But from the perspective of ensuring that an independent press can do its job, it's important to understand what these new communication strategies have allowed the White House to do. Take the matter of who gets to photograph official White House events. In 2005, when the issue came to a head, the AP could refuse to distribute the official White House photo of an event, giving the press considerable leverage with the Bush administration in making its case for access.

But that leverage is gone. The Obama White House has its own Flickr feed—a de facto wire service—from which anyone can pull Pete Souza's official photos. (The economic crisis facing journalism isn't helping the situation, as *Newsweek*, for instance, has left the White House photo pool, and relies more and more on the White House handout photos.)

Or consider how, when pressed by journalists on the diminished opportunities to question the president, the administration points to the array of Q&A sessions available online in which the president has interacted with citizens.

Though he meant it pejoratively, George W. Bush was right: the press does filter the administration's message on its way to the American people. At its best—and let's stipulate that both the White House and Washington press corps often fall short of our ideals—that press filter knocks down egregious spin and outright falsehoods, challenges the administration narrative, and provides important context.

That crucial job is made more difficult when the White House can bypass the press corps and at the same time limit its access to the president and other decision-makers. Finding new ways for our government to communicate with citizens is laudable, and even good for democracy. But it should not—and need not—come at the expense of a free and unfettered fourth estate. **CJR**

CLINT HENDLER writes about government transparency issues for CJR.org. Research support was provided by The Investigative Fund at The Nation Institute.

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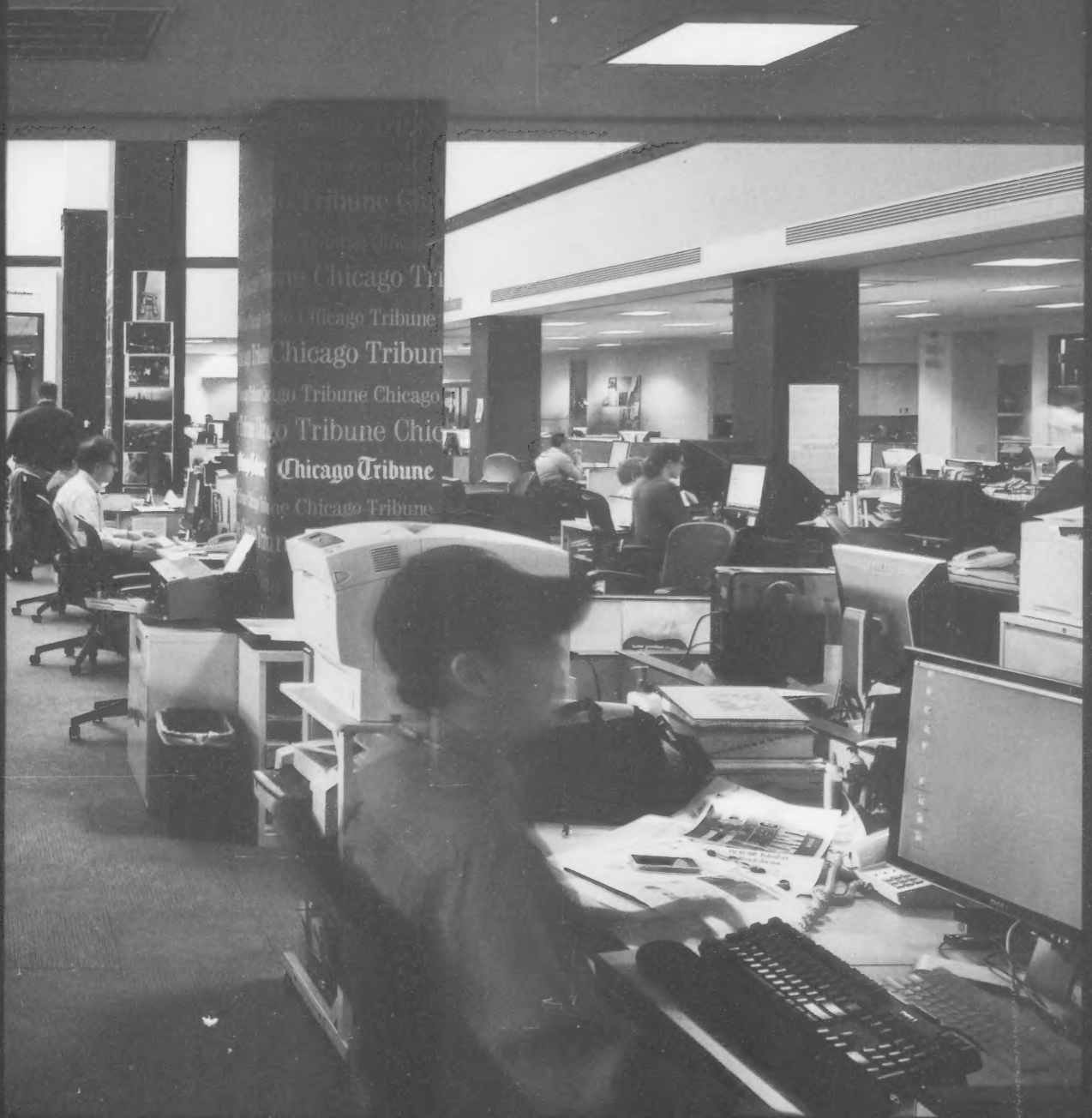
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A Second Chance

How mobile devices can absolve journalism of its original sin: giving away online content

BY CURTIS BRAINARD

1 Talk to people who are into mobile reading devices like the Kindle and the iPad, and a scene from the movie *Minority Report* tends to come up. Tom Cruise, who is on the run from the law, is on a train. Next to him, a man reads *USA Today* on what looks and acts like broadsheet paper but is clearly digital film of some sort, with animated graphics and flashing news updates. Suddenly, a photo of Cruise pops up on the man's

(and everyone else's) gadget, along with an announcement that he is wanted for murder.

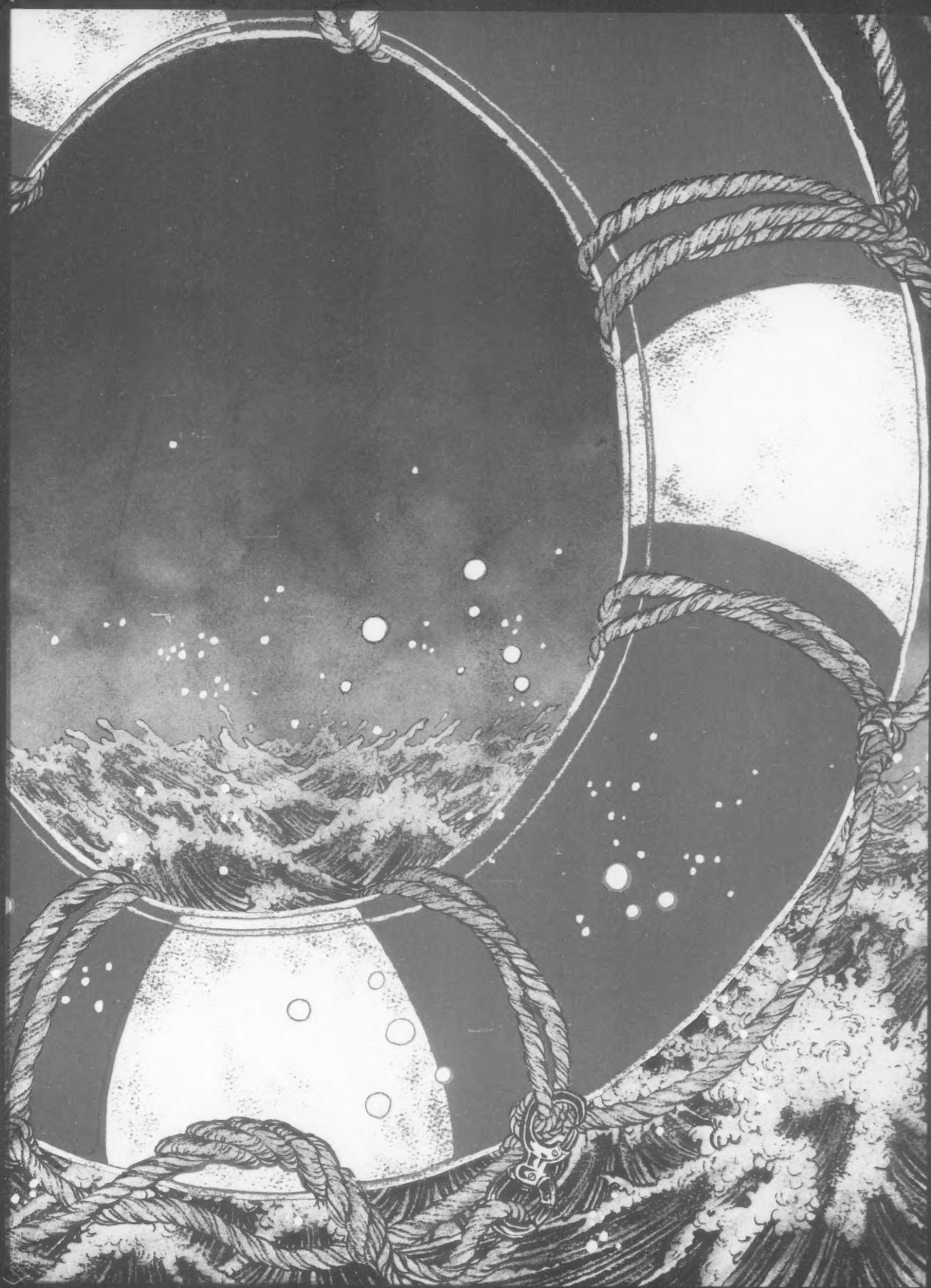
It's a bummer for Cruise, but that screen makes techies swoon: paper-thin, it has the slight gloss of a laminate but otherwise looks like typical newsprint, though it is clearly connected to some ultrafast wireless network and can instantly access the limitless information of the future Internet. You get the impression that, after Cruise fled the train, the man folded up that screen, shoved it into his briefcase, and took it out later to find *USA Today* (or the publication of his choice) waiting with a fresh batch of articles. Alas, no such product actually exists...yet. But it's closer than you may think. Steven Spielberg and crew developed the idea based on input from E-Ink, a manufacturer of so-called electronic paper based in Cambridge, Massachusetts, which *The Boston Globe* last year called the "hottest technology company" in the Boston area.

Hollywood has long been something of a bellwether for advanced technologies, and that is certainly the case here. In April, I called Sri Peruvemba, E-Ink's marketing director. The company was involved in one of the most conspicuous recent examples of journalism's pursuit of this digital Holy Grail: an electronic-paper cover that *Esquire* magazine used on its seventy-fifth anniversary issue in September 2008. Peruvemba directed me to a YouTube video of critics from Gizmodo, Gawker Media's popular gadget site, trying to "hack" it. "Wait until they get the knives," Peruvemba chirped, after I noted the cover's impressive resistance to the hackers' attempts to tear it apart by hand and light it on fire.

Rugged, shatterproof screens will be a key feature of future e-readers, but overall, Gizmodo was lukewarm about *Esquire's* experiment: "This is really slick in some ways—as far as attention goes—but the bigger thing it shows is the terrible lack of understanding that most magazine editors have in dealing with the digital future of their publications." That's probably true. *The New York Times* reported that *Esquire* made a six-figure investment to develop the battery alone—hardly a sustainable model for the industry, even if Ford did buy an ad, executed on e-paper, on the inside cover.

But it's not just the battery; it's the gimmicky, one-off approach. Media outlets are still having a tough time seeing beyond their own dwindling print runs, and it was only three years ago that electronic paper helped incite what has been called the "e-reading revolution." It's not much of a revolution yet, but what is increasingly apparent is that mobile devices have the potential to offer the journalism business that rare and beautiful thing: a second chance—another shot at monetizing digital content and ensuring future profitability that was missed during the advent of Web 1.0.

I use the word "potential" because there are many ifs and unknowns undergirding this notion of a second chance. But I use it also because so much of the hype about how e-readers could save journalism that has poured forth since the release of the iPad in April (actually, such articles have been appearing since the launch of the Kindle in 2007), ignores—or fails to grasp—what's really going on. Proponents of the revolution believe that a richly designed and robust mobile reader will be a boon to digital subscriptions, and more importantly to advertising, in a way, and at a rate, that the Web has not. What this theory hinges on, though—and what the hype has tended



If publishers had their own digital storefront, they could cut out the middleman, charge for subscriptions, and the advertisers would follow.

to overlook—is the need for the media companies that create news and other editorial content to reclaim control over the channels of delivery for that content—the kind of control they had when the printing press was still at the center of our information universe.

While it is fine (in fact it's crucial) that your newspaper or magazine be available by subscription on the Kindle or by app on the iPad, that alone isn't enough. There are some fifty e-readers using e-paper screen technology on the market worldwide, in addition to the iPad (which actually uses LCD technology rather than e-paper). Of these, the most popular by far are the Kindle, the Sony Reader, and the Barnes & Noble Nook. As Amazon has forcefully demonstrated during its pricing wars with book publishers, however, relying on a third-party device maker and content retailer can be limiting in important ways. Amazon takes around 65 percent of the revenues from e-book sales (at the end of June, Amazon began offering publishers the option of flipping the equation in their favor, but doing so means sacrificing a significant amount of control over the book's pricing). Apple has been more generous to publishers, taking *only* a 30 percent commission on sales, and media companies hope that the launch of the iPad and other more publisher-friendly e-readers will force Amazon and other content and device "e-tailers" to strike more agreeable bargains.

But if publishers developed, or subcontracted the development of, their own content management system for mobile devices, and opened their own digital stores to sell that content, then in theory they could charge for subscriptions and effectively cut out the middleman. They could then use this paying, engaged audience—and the demographic information that comes with it—to attract advertisers. There are signs, nascent and tentative, that this is beginning to happen.

2 For the moment, a project called Next Issue Media is the boldest and most comprehensive of these efforts. Founded in December 2009, it is a partnership of five lions—Condé Nast, News Corporation, Hearst, Meredith, and Time Inc.—that have banded together like some Voltron of mass media, out to save the news business. The idea is to set up a one-stop clearinghouse for digital newspaper and magazine content. Publishers and consumers could use it to distribute

and purchase content for a variety of smart phones, e-readers, tablets, netbooks, desktops, and laptops (the emphasis, though, is on hand-held mobile devices). The group has no plans to develop its own e-reader, but it does intend to "partner with device manufacturers and software developers to create technical and universal standards for our new, comprehensive e-reading initiative."

The Next Issue folks are cagey about the details of their operation, preferring to wait until they have an actual product to show off. But John Squires, who left his job as an executive vice president at Time Inc. to captain Next Issue Media, tells me that one of the first priorities is to develop a simple, open-platform system that makes it easy for publishers to distribute and format their editorial content for a variety of different screens—"one that renders the distinctive look and feel of your publications across multiple devices, operating systems and screen sizes," as the group's Web site puts it. "It is critical for publishers to continue to own and manage customer relationships directly," Squires says.

This back end will facilitate a kind of online store—an iTunes for news, if you will—where people can subscribe to a variety of publications for as many devices as they like. Squires calls this a "fairly complicated technical challenge." Indeed, the new media editor at *NRC Handelsblad*, a Dutch newspaper that has been publishing digital editions of its product on several e-readers since 2008, says that setting up an efficient publishing platform is a challenge, but the first, and perhaps most important, step toward capturing readers. He stressed, however, that trial and error is the only way forward, and that publishers should not wait "for the perfect ecosystem" to begin experimenting with new digital products. (Europe, in general, is further down this road than we are in the U.S., but more on that later.)

The next step is to develop a similarly simple procedure for advertisers to launch new campaigns with one or multiple publishers on one or a range of devices. Squires says Next Issue Media will work with the advertising industry to develop new metrics and analytical tools that will be different from those used to evaluate print and Web advertising—again, details are sparse, but the idea is to measure "engagement" with ads rather than "clicks." This likely means spending more time analyzing how long readers linger on a page, especially one with a large ad (although, to some extent, this is done now). The scheme will allow each publisher to control the sales and pricing of its advertising on the platform.

This all will take time, of course, but Squires says there will likely be some significant announcements from Next Issue by late summer or early fall.

All of the companies in Next Issue Media were relatively farsighted, technology-wise, even before they joined forces, and perhaps none more so than Hearst, which helped launch E-Ink back in 1997. Hearst continues to play a trailblazing role, having invested in a company two years ago called First-Paper. We didn't hear much about the company until late last year when, rebranded as Skiff, LLC, it launched a slick Web site that outlined its goals. Like Next Issue Media, Skiff wants to create a publishing and advertising infrastructure on the back end with an online store at the front, but the two proj-

ects are independent of each other. Unlike Next Issue, Skiff is also testing the hardware waters, having developed a reader with an eleven-and-a-half-inch e-paper touch screen. It's a flexible display, which makes it shatterproof, rugged, and light, but it is set in a rigid frame (which houses supporting electronics). It looks sort of like a hybrid of the Kindle and the iPad, but will probably lean heavily toward the former in terms of functionality. That is, if Skiff releases it at all. In June, as this issue was about to close, News Corporation bought Skiff from Hearst—but it only bought the publishing platform, leaving the future of the reader, which was a hot item at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas in January, uncertain. Indeed, before the deal was announced, several people I interviewed were under the impression that Skiff was rethinking its planned launch of the reader in order to focus on the publishing, subscription, and advertising platform—like Next Issue Media. Both Hearst, which still owns the reader, and Skiff declined to comment.

While Skiff's reader awaits its fate, its main rival, a device called Que made by a company called Plastic Logic, is moving ahead and targeting the business community with the pitch that it offers "news that looks like news." It is also an e-paper,

The fact that many people have already accepted the need to pay on mobile devices is their most elementary magic from a publisher's standpoint.

tablet-style device with a large, flexible touch screen, and the Que store has signed up some two dozen newspapers and magazines. Although Plastic Logic doesn't have a Hearst bankrolling it, *USA Today* and the *Financial Times*, as well as the Detroit Media Partnership, which manages the *Detroit Free Press* and *The Detroit News*, have worked closely with the company throughout the development process. Patricia Kelly, the vice president in charge of digital solutions at the Detroit Media Partnership, says this "is a better approach than waiting for somebody to come out with something and asking, 'How can we get on there?'" For instance, a newspaper would have a wish list for the page design on a reader that would be very different from what the Kindle offers, because the Kindle is built for books, and that is what most people use it for.

Building the devices and the infrastructure is a crucial first step on the road to a second chance. But once the storefronts are built, will the readers come? More importantly, will they pay?

3 It is important to understand that e-readers have thus far done nothing to fundamentally improve the journalism industry's bottom line. Many media executives interviewed for this article described themselves as "bullish" about the long-term potential of mobile devices. They see an opportunity, but don't know how big it is, and most are skeptical that subscription and advertising revenues will ever return to pre-Internet levels. Moreover, a number of authorities on the subject, such as Sarah Rotman Epps, who studies e-readers and the news media for Forrester Research, stress that many big media companies have "legacy problems"—debt, overhead, real estate, inflexible labor structures, etc.—that technology will never overcome. Within that context, a lot is possible, but a number of variables will determine whether the second chance is as profound a moment as some think.

The first and most significant variable is whether—and why—consumers will continue to pay for content on mobile devices. The fact that many people have already accepted the need to pay is, after all, the e-reader's most elementary magic from a publisher's standpoint. There are many theories about how the magic works. One of the most logical is that mobile devices have enabled what Epps calls "a return to curated computing." Basically, the subscriptions on a Kindle or the apps on an iPad provide a more restricted reading experience than the Web, but in a way that enhances the experience. Unlike the chaos of links, summations, images, and ads on a Web page, mobile readers give you a simple, curated list of top stories, period. Think of surfing the Web as wandering through a museum warehouse, piled with every dusty knickknack it ever collected, and using mobile readers as visiting its galleries, where experts have lovingly gathered highlights. This restricted experience, the theory goes, adds value to the news product and makes people willing pay for it.

But there is also a transactional aspect to the magic—people need an easy way to tender their payments. Mobile devices enable publishers to collect money from consumers in a way that hasn't existed on the Web since America Online's heyday in the 1990s. In that era, people gave AOL their credit card numbers, and in return got both access and proprietary content like e-mail, games, and news. The content was, in essence, tied to access. When broadband arrived, content and access were disaggregated. We began paying an Internet service provider, like Time Warner Cable, for access, but it no longer came with e-mail, games, or news. That content could be found elsewhere, of course, and plenty of sites were giving it away for free. That is how the Web effectively tricked the journalism industry into believing that people won't pay for a well-curated news experience, even if you make it effortless to do so. Mobile readers, some believe, are reconnecting access and content.

Squires suspects that one of the reasons Amazon was able to incite the e-reading "revolution," such as it is, was that it already had thousands of its customers' credit cards on file when it launched the Kindle, which made it easy for them to buy books. The same holds true for the iPad and iTunes App Store. Once again, one credit card buys access and the all the content—including news—that a consumer desires. "One of

the biggest issues about content providers getting paid was not that their content wasn't valuable, it was that they didn't have an effective way to bill the consumer," Squires says. "It's almost as simple as that."

Here's where it gets tricky, though. Web browsers will likely always be popular, because the larger walls of the Internet have been permanently torn down (AOL can attest to that) and people want all that free content to which those browsers provide access. News outlets' Web sites are currently the path of least resistance to their work. What publishers must realize, then, is that the golden egg of the "revolution" is not that e-readers offer a second chance to monetize digital content on mobile devices alone, but rather digital content on *all* platforms. Web sites must be pulled into the equation. "As a publisher, you're going to have to figure out what you want to do because you can't give it away for free one place and charge in another," Squires says.

If consumers are willing to pay for content, then the next question is how to structure the pricing for a store that services a range of devices and publications. Next Issue Media, Skiff, and a number of individual media companies are talking a lot about single-copy and subscription models with one price for access to content for all your devices, mobile or otherwise. By offering this news bundle, outlets would, in essence, be creating a valuable new service—the multiplatform, single subscription—rather than just suddenly charging for an old one that used to be free. This digital subscription might also be bundled with the print edition, but for the foreseeable future news outlets are likely to go with some sort of tiered subscription structure with options for print-only, digital-only, or "everything."

The Wall Street Journal has used such a system to become the largest circulation daily in the country. The weekly subscription to its iPad app is \$3.99 (but is available to subscribers free for a limited time), compared to \$2.69 for print and online, \$2.29 for print only, and \$1.99 for online only. Its Kindle subscription runs \$14.99 per month, a bit cheaper than its iPad app. (The *Journal* sidesteps sharing subscription revenue with Apple by making its app free and requiring customers to pay the *Journal* directly to register to use it, which is ingenious if cumbersome.) Amazon doesn't release newspaper subscription numbers, but the *Journal* recently disclosed that it has 64,000 iPad subscribers and 15,000 Kindle subscribers, compared to its daily print circulation of nearly 2 million. That's probably a high benchmark—many publications have only a couple hundred e-reader subscribers. Official, industry-wide statistics on e-reader subscribers are scarce, but these numbers are sure to rise, perhaps dramatically. Also, in order to maintain the optimal balance between quantity and "quality" of their readers and viewers, news outlets will likely have to keep some content—especially short, breaking-news updates—outside of their digital paywalls, as *The Wall Street Journal* does now.

At ten to twenty dollars per month, on average, subscriptions won't add up to much, especially if publishers are not able to regain some modicum of control over pricing (whether through the so-called agency model with third-party retailers or through their own stores). Moreover, surveys conducted

Offering access on all your digital devices for one price is a valuable new service, not just charging for an old one that used to be free.

by Forrester Research have shown that consumers expect a 40 to 50 percent discount on the price of yearlong subscriptions and single issues relative to print editions.

But subscriptions have never paid the bills for newspapers. Advertising, of course, was the moneymaker, and this is the major shortcoming of the Kindle and its e-paper ilk. Once you've got the infrastructure and the subscription system in place, you need to crack the ad problem. The fact that no model exists to get ads onto these devices has left many media companies that have worked with Amazon angry and frustrated, and despite repeated promises that such capability is on its way, nobody is sure when it will arrive. Meanwhile, Apple's new operating system (OS 4) for iPhones and iPads, whose release is expected sometime this summer, will include the new iAd mobile advertising platform, which news outlets and other developers can use to embed personalized ads directly into their apps. It works just like Google's AdMob service for standard Web sites, but has the same limitation as AdMob insofar as Apple, rather than publishers, retains control over ad sales and strategy. Apple plans to take a 40 percent cut of the ad revenue. And like Google, Apple will probably go after the largest, national advertising campaigns rather than the locally oriented, small- and medium-sized ones that have been periodicals' bread and butter.

It is unclear how Skiff and Next Issue Media's advertising services will compare to iAd and AdMob. Both will surely feature some kind of revenue-sharing agreement with publishers, but again, Next Issue says the publishers will control ad sales and pricing, which is a step in the right direction for the news business. Once the infrastructure is in place, many media executives believe that paying mobile subscribers will present an attractive, captive audience to advertisers, especially given some of the hyper-targeted advertising possibilities that the devices will allow.

4 From subscription structure to advertising, there is a lot we don't know about how the e-reader market will take shape for the news business. The answers will come only through aggressive experimentation, through trial and error. That process is well under way in Europe, and the efforts there have some lessons for the U.S. market. A Flemish paper that handed out 200 e-readers to subscribers in

2006 and measured their response found that most of them likened the experience to reading the paper product rather than the Web site, and 45 percent said they would consider buying an e-reader. *NRC Handelsblad*, the Dutch newspaper, expanded delivery of its digital edition to a variety of devices after an exclusive launch on the iRex iLiad reader in 2008 drew "substantial sales." In other words, people like these things and will pay to get news on them.

Next Issue Media has also done consumer research and found a high level of interest in e-readers and digital news, especially once people have seen a demonstration. Nonetheless, in the U.S., most media companies have so far proceeded with caution. "What I see is a lot of watching, waiting, and one-off initiatives," says Forrester's Sarah Rotman Epps.

There are signs—beyond Next Issue, Skiff, and Plastic Logic—that this may be changing. MediaNews Group, which owns fifty-four small- to large-sized papers across the country (plus over 200 niche magazines), is, like Next Issue Media, trying to create the back-end infrastructure so that its properties can distribute content across the range of digital platforms (it also has deals with both Skiff and Que). And three years ago, the Reynolds Institute at the University of Missouri launched the Digital Publishing Alliance, comprised of more than thirty news outlets, technology companies, and media organizations, which is researching the mobile market and developing best practices and standards for e-readers and other mobile devices. (For an interview with DPA's Roger Fidler, go to www.cjr.org/behind_the_news/fidler_q_and_a.php.)

But given the state of the economy and the general beaten-down mood in the American news business, it would be naïve to suggest that a full-blown e-reader revolution is at hand. Some four months before the ABC survey, for instance, in March 2009, the Digital Advisory Committee of the Newspaper Association of America—a body that includes senior digital media executives from member outlets—held a first-of-its-kind meeting with e-reader manufacturers in order to acquaint participants with some of the emerging products. While the group didn't necessarily see the devices as a game-changing technology, according to Randy Bennett, the NAA's head of business development, many intuitively recognized the opportunity to rebuild some portion of their former revenue streams. A few months later, Derek Robinson, Bennett's counterpart at the Cox Media Group, which owns forty-three newspapers, built a financial model to measure the potential economic effects of moving a thousand subscribers from print to electronic delivery. The answer? It would take a newspaper 4.1 years to break even on its investment in the migration.

That doesn't sound so bad, perhaps, but the model was full of mostly dummy data. For instance, while it used ad revenue of \$700 per print subscriber, based on current data from the Newspaper Association of America, it assumed that figure would decrease by only 20 percent on e-readers. That's a dubious estimate, however. Other NAA data, not used in the model, puts current online ad revenue at \$46 per unique monthly visitor—a decrease of 95 percent compared to print.

Still, the point was for publishers to plug in their own pro-

prietary data to determine the feasibility of a print-to-digital migration given their newsrooms' particular circumstances. Most media executives accept the value of holding on to a print subscriber, however, and all of those interviewed for this article said that while they want to encourage as many e-readers as possible, it would be unwise to hasten the switch to mobile reading.

5 At the end of May, I attended the Society for Information Display's annual conference in Seattle, where companies from around the world had gathered to show off their latest screens, using a variety of technologies. Device manufacturers sold roughly 1 million readers using e-paper displays in 2008 and 5 million last year, according to DisplaySearch, a market research firm. That is expected to grow to 14.5 million this year. By 2018, DisplaySearch predicts that more than 90 million units will be sold around the globe, including 20 million with ten-inch or larger screens that the company has begun referring to as "e-newspapers" and "e-magazines." Together, the Kindle and Sony Reader control more than 50 percent of the market, but everyone agrees that there is plenty of room for "disruptive" technology innovation to catapult a newcomer to stardom.

The iPad, which sold a million units in its first month (the Kindle sold half a million during its first year), has brought more attention to e-readers and mobile devices in general. Since the iPad's emergence, there has been much debate about whether or not it will become the so-called "Kindle Killer." It is fairly safe to say, given their different qualities and ways that consumers will use e-readers—for instance, reading (Kindle) versus entertainment (iPad)—that this won't be the case.

But what became clear to me while reporting this piece, and was really driven home at the Seattle gathering, is that the debate over which technology, or device, is superior is mostly beside the point. The rate of evolution is moving so quickly that in ten years e-readers will have become like televisions and cell phones, meaning there will be hundreds of affordable varieties that basically do the same things. As Cox's Derek Robinson reported in March, in an update to his survey that he provided to the NAA, "E-readers may just be the tip of the iceberg... We as an industry have begun to look beyond e-readers and are now considering the entire ecosystem of 'emerging platforms.'"

That is why staying ahead of the technology curve—both for hardware and software—is crucial. As device manufacturers race toward that do-it-all e-reader of the future seen in *Minority Report*, media companies must follow Next Issue's lead and make strategic partnerships that will allow them to influence the products and retailing mechanisms coming to market. The circulation levels and ad dollars of yesterday may be gone for good, but there are real opportunities to reclaim control of journalism's financial future. Second chances are rare, and if we miss this opportunity to capitalize on digital content, we may not get a third. **CJR**

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Justice for Conroy

John Conroy spent years exposing police torture in Chicago. Now the alleged leader is on trial, and the reporter is laid off.

BY DON TERRY

If life were fair and the gods of journalism just, I would be able to report to you that when John Conroy was laid off by the *Chicago Reader* nearly three years ago, his bosses quickly came to their senses and rehired him, and he has continued with his award-winning, life-saving investigative reporting ever since. I'd be able to tell you that after almost single-handedly exposing a torture ring of rogue officers inside the Chicago Police

Department—a reign of terror that may have sent scores of wrongfully convicted poor black men to prison, and, in some cases, to death row—Conroy covered what could be the last chapter of the decades-long scandal this spring without having to go around town knocking on doors to find an editor willing to pay him more than what he was making in 1975.

Finally, I wouldn't have to report that Conroy now is "sometimes given to despair" and is seriously thinking about quitting journalism, even though in these perilous times journalism needs his kind more than ever.

Since this is not a fairy tale, but a nonfiction dispatch from the frontlines of twenty-first century American journalism, I have to tell you instead that Conroy, who recently turned fifty-nine, hasn't had a full-time job since he was laid off in December 2007 by the *Reader*, Chicago's free weekly alternative newspaper that used to come in four sections, choked with ads and listings, but now comes in only one. "For years

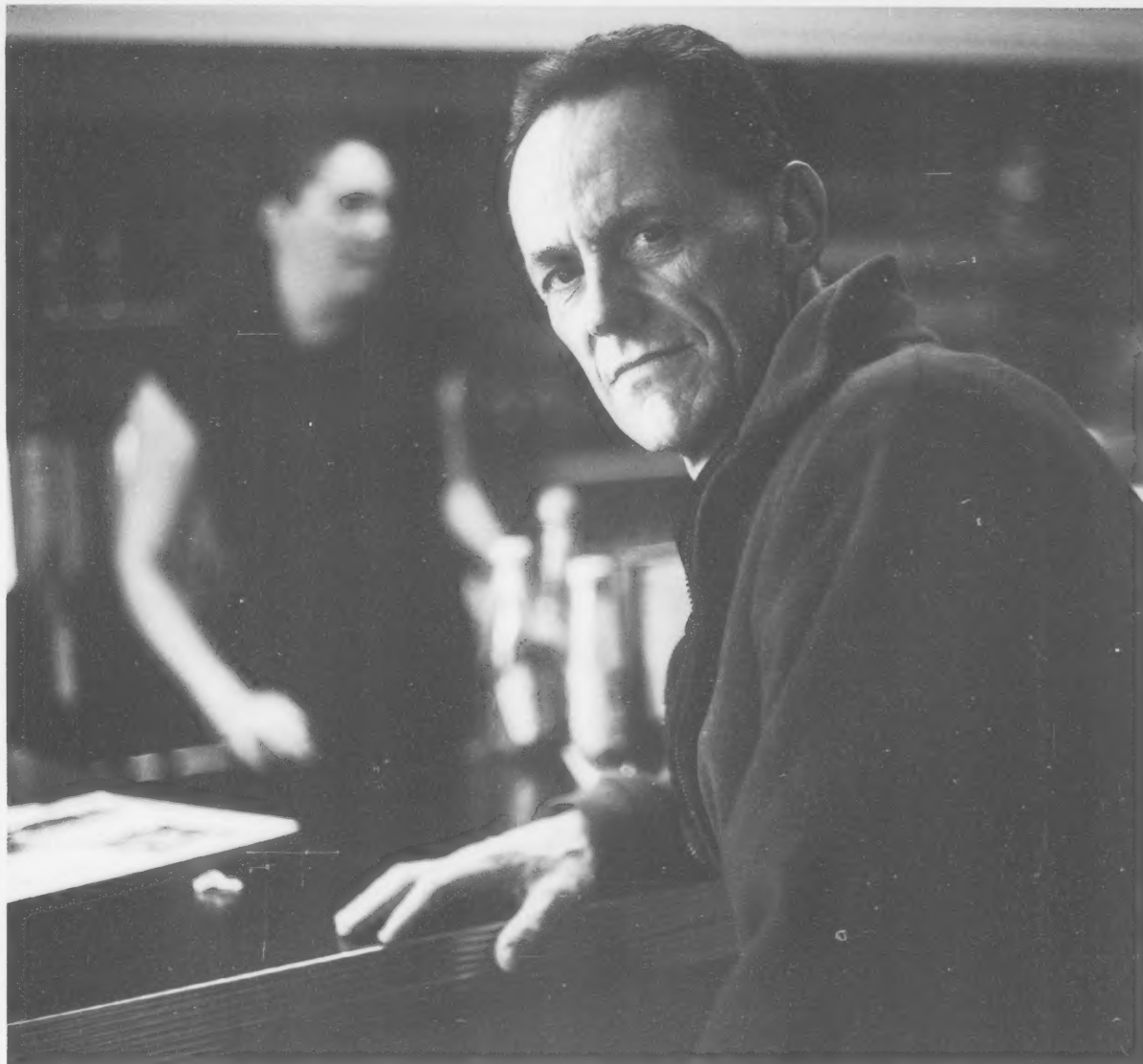
a lot of journalists in town just didn't take us seriously," says Mike Lenehan, a former editor and part-owner of the *Reader* before it was sold in 2007. "We were just the free paper. In those days, 'free paper' was a stigma. John's work changed that."

Since it was founded in 1971, Conroy did more, perhaps, than anyone in the paper's fine lineup of writers to put the *Reader* on the map of serious journalism. There's no question that Conroy did more than anyone else in all of journalism to expose police torture in Chicago. Conroy and the *Reader* kept the story alive for years until reinforcements arrived from the downtown dailies and a group of Northwestern University journalism students and their professor. Eventually, the efforts of Conroy and other journalists—especially Maurice Possley, Steve Mills, and Ken Armstrong from the *Chicago Tribune*, who broadened the story to include prosecutorial misconduct—defense lawyers, anti-death-penalty advocates, and a citizens' police watchdog group convinced then-Illinois Governor George Ryan that the system was broken. In 2003, Governor Ryan emptied death row, sparing the lives of more than 160 condemned men and women, several of whom said their confessions were false and had been extracted through torture by a police commander named Jon Burge and his detectives inside a police station that came to be known, in some circles, as "the house of screams."

Jo Ann Patterson's son Aaron, a gang member, was "interrogated" inside that station house before being convicted of double homicide. She has no doubt that her son would be dead today, executed for a crime he did not commit, if not for the long, lonely crusade of John Conroy. "John's articles helped save Aaron's life and showed how the system can really get you caught up," she says. "But Aaron wasn't the only one John saved. A lot of people owe him their thanks."

Over the years, the city has shelled out millions in legal fees and settlements, including nearly \$20 million to Patterson's son and three others arrested by Burge and his officers. In 2006, a special Cook County prosecutor's investigation concluded that the commander and his men had obtained dozens of confessions through torture. "I can't begin to tell you," says Andrea D. Lyon, a criminal defense attorney and the author of *Angel of Death Row*, a memoir about her experience representing condemned prisoners, "what an enormous loss it is to not have someone like John doing the in-depth work he was doing."

Lyon says everyone involved in Chicago's criminal jus-



'Unsung hero' Conroy, an old-school investigative reporter, has struggled to find work since 2007.

tice system knew something was amiss at the Area 2 police headquarters on the city's Far South Side, where most of the alleged torture took place. Prosecutors knew it. Judges knew. Reporters knew, too. But no one, she says, said or wrote anything about it until Conroy and maybe one or two others came along. "The groundwork came from John Conroy rolling that big stone up that steep hill," she says. "He's utterly trustworthy and honest. You don't hand over your files to him if you think your guy is guilty. He'll find a witness that maybe the prosecution couldn't find. He's patient, easy to talk to. He's smart but not arrogant. He's part of a dying breed, a real-life investigative reporter who cares. He's an unsung hero."

Where has Conroy gone? Wherever he can find work. Con-

roy—the author of two well-received nonfiction books, *Belfast Diary: War As A Way of Life*, on the troubles in Northern Ireland, and *Unspeakable Acts, Ordinary People*, an examination of the practice of torture in three democracies: Belfast, Israel, and Chicago—has transformed from journalist to juggler, trying to keep several freelance jobs in the air at once. One of his gigs is writing scripts for online health videos about domestic violence, STDs, and childhood obesity. He's written a few magazine pieces, including a first-person account of getting mugged in 2008. He has done some radio reporting. He has also worked as an investigator for a lawyer pal with whom he plays hockey in a no-slap-shot, no-check league. He started playing at age fifty-four. So far, he's worked on

two narcotics cases for his friend and now is investigating a murder case—the stabbing of a barber on Thanksgiving eve, 2008. “I have to do other things to support the journalism,” he says. “It’s very stressful. The pay is low and getting lower. It’s become demeaning. I have two kids. I’m not a spring chicken. Sometimes I am given to despair.”

Tall and lanky, with the lived-in face of a character actor, Conroy is the kind of reporter your mother dreamed you would grow up to be: dogged, driven, caring, righteous, cranky, smoldering, and moral. Don’t take your mother’s word for it, though. Check it out. Conroy would.

STRETCHING BACK NEARLY TWO DECADES, CONROY’S nuanced, morally complicated stories about what was allegedly happening inside “the house of screams” set the agenda for much of the coverage by Chicago’s two daily newspapers and its television newsrooms. Conroy’s articles, such as a piece he wrote in 2006 called, “The Police Torture Scandals: A Who’s Who,” were a vital road map for any reporter—or prosecutor, defense lawyer, or civilian police department investigator—coming fresh to the story. “The scale of criminality,” he wrote,

is immense: hundreds of assaults (most victims were subjected to more than one attack), hundreds of acts of misconduct qualifying as felonies. Some detectives, called to testify in various proceedings, may have committed perjury on five or more occasions in a single case.

And knowledge of the abuse traveled up the ranks: Police superintendents were informed of the torture and knew the identities of some of the torturers. State’s attorneys were informed of the torture, and no one was ever prosecuted. Now that the statute of limitations has run on many if not all of these crimes, state prosecution is unlikely, though victims’ attorneys hold out hope that federal charges are possible.

All of the known victims are black. Some were sent to death row on the basis of tortured confessions and perjured testimony by police, and many are still serving long sentences. All of their confessions are suspect.

Most of the accused police officers are white. Many have been promoted or have retired with pensions. Some of the prosecutors informed of the torture are now judges. One serves on the Illinois Appellate Court. And one is the mayor.

The tools of torture included burning suspects on radiators, beatings, mock executions, games of Russian roulette, near suffocation with typewriter covers, and electric shock to the genitals. No one has been tried for the alleged torture that went on inside the house of screams. Until now.

In May, high above the streets of the city he patrolled for years, often with honor and distinction, the alleged leader of the torture ring, Jon Burge—a burly, first-through-the-door, decorated Vietnam veteran—went on trial in federal district court in Chicago. Burge’s path to the Dearborn Street courthouse was blazed by the more than 100,000 words Conroy wrote over the years about the case.

But Burge, who is sixty-two, lives in Florida on a police pension, and is reportedly battling cancer, is not facing charges of torture. The statute of limitations on that charge ran out long

ago. Instead, he is facing perjury and obstruction of justice for allegedly lying in 2003 during a civil suit about his role in the torture ring. Burge has always maintained his innocence. One of his lawyers, Richard Beuke, refused to comment on the case or Conroy. Beuke said Burge would not comment either.

No journalist knows more about Burge, or the band of alleged torturers in blue he is supposed to have led, than Con-

The tools of torture included burning suspects on radiators, games of Russian roulette, and electric shock to the genitals.

roy. Yet, on the first day of jury selection in early May, Conroy didn’t have an assignment to cover the trial. He showed up in the twenty-fifth-floor courtroom anyway. Faith and stubbornness made him go. “I’ll probably cover it for somebody, hopefully not full of resentment for what I’m being paid,” he says. “Part of me is wondering why I’m doing this. I guess there’s this sense of seeing something through. And I actually think I could cover this case pretty well.”

Conroy sat about twenty-five feet behind Burge. From behind, Conroy says, Burge looked much the same as he did when they first met in 1989. When Burge slowly got out of his chair and said, “Good morning, ladies and gentlemen,” to the prospective jurors, Conroy says he recognized “the same gravelly voice.”

When the proceedings finished for the day, Conroy lingered, hoping to have a word with Burge. But Burge and his lawyers left too quickly. “I would have said hello,” Conroy says. “I don’t know how he feels about what I have done. There are a lot of people out there screaming that Jon Burge is a monster, but I have not portrayed Jon Burge as a monster.” In a 2005 piece, for example, Conroy dug into Burge’s army record from the 1960s that described how the eighteen-year-old recruit went on to become a military policeman in Korea, “gathering five letters of appreciation from superiors that praised his loyalty, devotion to duty, outstanding performance, military bearing, appearance, attention to detail, tact, and extra effort.”

In 1968, Burge volunteered for Vietnam. He returned home in 1969 and soon joined the Chicago Police Department. In 1972, Conroy wrote, Burge prevented a twenty-two-year-old woman on the South Side from committing suicide by jamming his thumb into the firing mechanism an instant before she squeezed the trigger.

“I think if you were to look at the press coverage of Jon Burge

and look who has written about the heroic things that he did on the job and in Vietnam, I'm pretty much solo," Conroy adds. "If someone else did it too, they took it from my coverage."

AS A YOUNG REPORTER IN THE MID-1970S, CONROY WAS about to leave his job at *Chicago Magazine*. Both man and magazine were young and raw, and he planned to move to South America to make his mark as a foreign correspondent. But a colleague convinced him to move instead to South Chicago, the land of steel mills and the tough people who worked them—Serbs, Croatians, Latinos, and African Americans. The colleague told him there were great stories to be told about urban politics, union conflicts, race, and the fading American dream. It was the gritty stuff of Upton Sinclair and Nelson Algren. Conroy agreed.

For decades, South Chicago had been one of America's entry points, a portal through which waves of migrants from Eastern Europe, Mexico, and the American South had come to find their footing. By the time Conroy arrived, the earth had shifted. The mills were on the edge of a steep and swift decline. A way of life was coming to an end. "I didn't quite understand it on an emotional level at the time," he says. "I wish I had made that connection because I'm now part of a dying industry. I didn't understand what it means that something that seemed rock solid when you were growing up would become a relic, something people talked about referring to the old days."

He wrote a five-part series about what he saw and learned in South Chicago, including the rise of a young politician nicknamed Fast Eddie and a bitter union election. "There was a lot of racism in South Chicago," he says. "And it's a cliché to call the politics bare-knuckled, but that's what it was. There were fist fights and people got hurt."

When his worthless '63 Chevy was stolen and one of the people he was writing about threatened to throw him down the stairs, Conroy decided it was finally time to see the world. In 1977, he went to Northern Ireland and freelanced for the *Chicago Daily News*, which had recently shut down its foreign bureaus as that great paper slid toward its grave.

Conroy spent a few weeks there and quickly realized how "bad the press coverage of Northern Ireland was," he says. "Reporters would fly over when there was a major incident. It was covered like you'd cover a fire. There wasn't any context to it. People back here couldn't understand why these two people who had the same color skin and worshiped the same God were fighting each other."

He started writing for the *Reader* in 1978. But he couldn't get the troubles out of his mind. Both his parents traced their roots to Ireland. His family had visited when he was a teenager. He still had relatives there. In 1980 he returned to Northern Ireland for ten months on an Alicia Patterson Fellowship to work on what became his first book, *Belfast Diary*. He got more than a book out of it. He also met his wife, Colette Davison, a psychologist.

Belfast Diary was published in 1987. By then, Conroy was back at the *Reader*. In 1988 Ann Close, an editor at Knopf, contacted him and told him she had read and admired the book. She proposed he write another, this time specifically

on torture, which was a way of life and war in Northern Ireland. Conroy had started researching torture around the world when a friend at the *Chicago Lawyer* newspaper told him about Andrew Wilson, a convicted cop killer, who claimed he had been tortured by police and was now suing in federal court.

Wilson's suit sounded interesting but preposterous. Wilson and his brother, Jackie, had been convicted of killing not one officer, but two—William Fahey and Richard O'Brien—during a traffic stop in the winter of 1982. Now Wilson was saying he had been tortured by some of Chicago's finest. Conroy walked into the courtroom, thinking Wilson did not have a chance. "He killed two cops—a career criminal, going up against decorated detectives—no way," Conroy says.

As the six-week trial dragged on, Conroy slowly began changing his mind after listening to the medical testimony and hearing both Wilson and Jon Burge, who at the time was the head of Area 2's detectives, testify. Maybe Wilson's charges of being burned by police and receiving electric shocks to his genitals, nose, ears, and fingers were not that preposterous. Maybe they were true. "I can't say there was a moment when I said, 'Oh, my God, this is true,' he says. "It was a gradual dawning."

Something else dawned on him. "I began to realize how important this was," he says. "And nobody seemed to care."

Conroy was often one of the few, if not the only, reporters in the courtroom. The proceedings ended in a mistrial, followed a short time later by a second weeks-long trial, in which Wilson won a mixed verdict. The jury found that his constitutional rights had been violated and that the city had a de facto policy of allowing police to abuse people suspected of killing police officers. But the jury also found that Wilson had not been subjected to excessive force as a result of that policy. (Wilson appealed and won a third civil suit in 1996. The city was ordered to pay \$100,000 to the family of Officer Fahey, which had filed a wrongful death suit against Wilson, and another \$900,000 to Wilson's attorneys. Wilson did not receive a dime and died in prison of natural causes in 2007, about three weeks before Conroy was laid off.)

Conroy sat through the first two trials but did not publish a single word until the final verdict was in. His story in the *Reader* hit the street on January 25, 1990. The headline was, "House of Screams, Torture by Electroshock: Could it happen in a Chicago police station? Did it happen at Area 2?" He thought his work was done. Now the downtown dailies would jump all over the story and the house of screams would come tumbling down. "John really was kind of waiting around for the lid to blow off and nothing happened," says Mike Lenehan, his former editor and still a close friend. "He was disillusioned. John has this strong streak of Irish Catholic to him. He's just as upright as a guy can be."

IF THE PRESS DIDN'T IMMEDIATELY SEE THE IMPORT OF Conroy's story, the inmate population in Illinois certainly did. Soon, Burge and his detectives were facing dozens of accusations of torture. In 1993, after an internal police department investigation and as the accusations against him continued to pour in, the city's Police Board fired Burge. He was never

John Conroy, you're a bad man. You've always told the truth. You never sugar-coated anything. Please stay the course. You made a difference.'

charged with a crime, though, and a number of men remained in prison, some on death row, as a result of the confessions they gave inside the interrogation room at Area 2. Conroy stayed on the story.

In 1996, the *Reader* published his second long article on the case, "Town Without Pity, Police Torture: The courts know about it, the media know about it, and chances are you know about it. So why aren't we doing anything about it?" Michael Miner, a *Reader* editor who writes a popular media column for the paper, edited most of the seventeen stories Conroy wrote about police torture. They often worked at Conroy's kitchen table in suburban Chicago, poring over documents and eating homemade scones.

The men knew they were treading in sensitive political territory. Every fact or assertion was double- and triple-checked. "John's a fastidious guy," Miner says. "He holds himself to a higher standard than anyone I know. He was extremely cautious in what he reported." They also knew they had "a terrific" story on their hands. "It seemed to be our franchise," Miner says. "One story suggested another. It was just a bottomless well of material."

ONE DAY IN EARLY DECEMBER 2007, MINER WAS IN THE *Reader* office just north of the Loop when Alison True, the editor, said she wanted to talk to him. True has been the *Reader's* editor since 1994. She proudly had given Conroy the time and the space to tell his incredible stories. Some of them ran close to 12,000 words. What True wanted to talk to Miner about was layoffs. It broke her heart, she told Miner, but Conroy and three other feature writers had to be let go. The paper, its editorial budget cut nearly in half, could no longer afford what Conroy did best. "The investigative reporters who remain on staff," she says, "are the ones who are in the paper every week."

Miner says True "was sick about it. I was sick too." They discussed the best way to handle it. True decided she would personally tell each of the four. Conroy was not in the office, so True drove to his home. She stayed about thirty minutes. "It was the worst day of my professional life," she says. "Maybe it was in the top two worst days of my personal life."

Conroy says he harbors no ill will. Regrets, sorrow, yes, but, "I'm still friends with the people who fired me."

One of his regrets is going into journalism in the first place. At least that's what he says when the bills are due and he doesn't know where his next freelance assignment is coming from. When Conroy set off for the University of Illinois in 1969, he wanted to make a lot of money. He majored in finance and got good grades. Conroy and his three sisters had heard stories from their Irish-American father, a salesman at Sears, about the horrors of the Great Depression. Conroy's mother, a bookkeeper and graduate of DePaul University, had her own Depression tales, but the memories were not seared into her soul.

But the campus and the country were in turmoil in those days. Conroy did not want to be on the sidelines. "I wanted to do some good in the world," he says. He switched his major to English with a minor in journalism. "It was probably the first bad business decision I made," he says. "If I had stayed the course as finance major I wouldn't be worried now about how I am going to get my kids through college."

After college, Conroy, who grew up in suburban Skokie, joined Vista, the domestic Peace Corps. During his nine months working with the poor on Long Island, he helped start a community newspaper, the *Fair Hearing*. Then he sent out 120 application letters, hoping to land a journalism job. He got three offers. "I was twenty-three years old," he recalled in his remarks upon receiving the Studs Terkel Award for excellence in reporting about Chicago's diverse communities in 2005. "I'd been hired by what later became *Chicago Magazine* as the bottom man on a three-man editorial totem pole. I was making \$7,500 a year and was worth about that much. At the time, *Chicago Magazine* was owned by WFMT, where Studs had his daily show and the magazine and radio station shared the same offices. So there was I, who knew nothing, sharing the same hallways with Studs, who knew everyone... and whose books were full of people you could not ordinarily read about, ordinary people doing extraordinary, brave, and sometimes questionable and even cruel things. I couldn't believe my luck."

Conroy is old school. He asks the questions, but he's reluctant to answer them, especially when they are about him. When he was approached by *Chicago Magazine* to write about being mugged in 2008, his instinct was to say no, even though he needed the money. He ended up writing the piece, "A Mugging on Lake Street," which was published in September 2009. In the piece he writes about his ambivalence: "As I scramble to make a living from freelance assignments, I should also be thankful that an editor solicited this story and kept the offer on the table until I overcame my reluctance. That editor was laid off while the contract was in the mail."

The article touches on the main issues of Conroy's reporting career—crime and violence, race and justice. It begins:

I was ambushed on the West Side last year, an attack that on its face made no sense. I'd never seen my assailant before; he'd never seen me; no words were exchanged; nothing was taken. Like many crime victims, I wanted the incident, which changed my life for the worse, to have some meaning. I'm white, he is black, and in time it was hard not to wonder if race had something to do with it.

His mugger turned out to be a teenager who stepped off a curb to slug Conroy, apparently for kicks, as the journalist rode past on his bicycle. The blow knocked Conroy to the pavement. He tore ligaments in his right knee. His face needed stitches. "I think of myself as a tolerant man," Conroy wrote, "but that tolerance has been taxed by the pain and the consequences to my body and my life."

Conroy eventually meets with his mugger, whom he calls Larry. Larry and his mother agree to cooperate on a story about the incident, but when Conroy calls them for an interview they duck him. He calls again and again until Larry's uncle demands payment for their cooperation. There is no interview. "Deep down," Conroy writes, "I've had an irrational and ridiculous sense of betrayal. As a fellow journalist put it when I tried to explain this to him, you pay into the karma bank, and you expect a certain protection in return."

I ask Conroy why he was so reluctant to tell this powerful personal story. He answers in an e-mail: "Writing about race is not difficult, but writing about race when you're in the story is a minefield. I did not want to write a story that made me out to be a whining victim." He tells me he worried about what the response might be, but it was better than he expected. "Nothing I've ever written has provoked such an outpouring of commentary, and although there's a certain gratification in the volume, there's also a definite sadness. I wrote about the likelihood of men being executed for crimes they might not have committed for years—a far more important topic—without hearing much of anything at all."

CONROY HAS WRITTEN A PLAY, *MY KIND OF TOWN*, BASED ON his reporting about police torture. He started writing it before he was laid off. Finishing the two-act drama has proven to be both therapeutic and nerve-wracking. There have been several readings of the play by professional actors, but so far it has not been staged. Nor has it done a thing for Conroy's bank account or the college fund for his two children.

On a chilly Chicago night, just before spring, a group of haunted men sit in the front row of Thorne Auditorium at the Northwestern University School of Law, waiting to hear a reading of *My Kind of Town* as part of a fundraiser for the Center on Wrongful Convictions based at Northwestern. They are tough men, from tough neighborhoods, street-accredited professors of crime and punishment. One of the men is an ex-general in a once-powerful Chicago street gang. Another used to be called Satan. Some perch on the edge of their seats as the night progresses. Others sink so low they almost disappear. All of them could teach a seminar about the unspeakable acts that even ordinary people inflict upon their fellow human beings in the name of law and order.

The men watch as two actors read a scene in which Rita and Albert, a divorced couple, argue about their son, Otha, a gang member on death row. Albert is a cop:

Rita: He didn't do it.

Albert: He did plenty. You don't know the half of it. What he

got, he had comin.

Rita: He did it all with guns. Now all a sudden he gonna burn down a building?

Albert: He confessed.

Rita: After they put a plastic bag over his head.

Albert: No, no, no. After Otha says they put a bag over his head...

Rita: So you think they had a shock machine, they shock a man in his private parts, but they ain't going to suffocate somebody?

Albert: I didn't say they had a shock machine.

Rita: But it wouldn't surprise you.

Albert: *does not reply.*

When the reading is over, one by one the men slowly troop to the stage to briefly share their stories with the 350 lawyers, students, and others in attendance. The man once known as Satan says he was dragged from his home by Jon Burge and his crew in 1973 and taken to the police station where he says he was tortured. "It's hard to speak about," he says. "No words can express how we feel."

The former gang chieftain speaks last. "Torture is hell beyond a shadow of a doubt," he says. "But please note, justice is coming." Then he looks down at Conroy seated in the front row. "John Conroy, you're a *bad* man," he says. "You've always told the truth. You never sugar-coated anything."

"Whatever you do, please stay the course as you have all these years," he says. "You have made a difference."

CONROY HAS STAYED THE COURSE. AND IN LATE MAY, HE got his own small measure of justice when WBEZ, a local public radio station, hired him to blog the Burge trial. "Blogging is sort of old dog, new tricks," Conroy says. "I've never worked for a daily before. Writing every day is going to be an interesting challenge."

His first blog post, on May 21, posed the question, "Would there be a Burge trial without Andrew Wilson's ears?" Conroy wrote that he has had "occasion to wonder if former police commissioner Jon Burge would still be a high-ranking officer today, indeed, if he might not have become superintendent, but for Andrew Wilson's ears." Photographs taken by a public defender of the scars on Wilson's ears shortly after Wilson had been interrogated by Burge and some of his men helped to convince a civil jury—and later the civilian police department investigators—that Wilson was telling the truth about being tortured with electric shock.

A few days after his first post about the trial, Conroy was back in the courtroom, taking notes on a yellow legal pad when Jonathan Jackson, the national spokesman for the Rainbow/PUSH Coalition and the son of the Reverend Jesse L. Jackson, introduced himself. For the last five years, Jonathan Jackson has been an outspoken advocate for "Burge's victims," and for the need to prosecute "their torturer." Jackson shook Conroy's hand and said, "It was your writing that got me into this. Thank you." **CJR**

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The Rise of Private News

A niche model can make a lot of money.

What are the costs?

BY CHRYSTIA FREELAND

Anyone who has spent time in a newsroom lately is familiar with the conversation—generally conducted in the “hushed tone you use for someone who’s just been through rehab or divorce,” as Bill Keller once put it—about the future of the news business. We’ve all figured out that Craigslist, Google, and other digital predators have decimated the print-advertising model, and that no matter how brilliant our Web sites, the shiny digital-

advertising dime doesn’t replace that old print dollar. This leaves us looking to subscription payments, particularly online, where readership remains strong. But charging for digital content reduces traffic, which might jeopardize that meager yet growing digital advertising revenue (though some hope that charging more to a smaller, but more devoted, subscription-paying audience can make up for that loss).

So for much of the media, finding the right income-stream balance—between advertising and subscriptions—has become an existential question. The discussion about the tradeoffs is sure to accelerate next year, when *The New York Times* plans to put some of its online content behind a paywall. Meanwhile new technology—the iPad and beyond—will inspire creative riffs on the subject, as *CJR*’s cover story, starting on page 24, makes clear.

But there is another wrinkle to consider. Some of the companies faring best in the news business today have built an

entirely different model, what we might call *private news*, and are working on an entirely different balancing act. Their challenge is to determine the right mix of focused, professional content—sold to a relatively small client base, usually bundled with data, for extremely high rates—with consumer content, which brings in less money but reaches a bigger audience.

The big question for these organizations is the inverse of the one troubling the mass news outlets in a digital world: their concern isn’t to find a model that allows their influential newsrooms to keep humming along; it is to achieve public influence commensurate with the size and ambition of the newsrooms their already-profitable business model has built. This is a balancing act I have come to know from the inside, and it comes with both promise and peril.

WHILE THE MODEL HAS BEEN AROUND for some time at such entities as the CQ-Roll Call Group, which offers a mix of public and private content, it has been edging a little further into the spotlight lately. In 2009, *The Wall Street Journal* introduced The Wall Street Journal Professional Edition, which for extra money offers search and organizing capabilities of both *Journal* articles and other material that is not available free on the Web. And in *CJR*’s July/August 2009 issue, Michael Shapiro argued in “Open for Business” that many daily newspapers could identify specific subjects for which readers would pay, and thus support their free general news. Think the

Detroit Free Press on automobiles.

The biggest examples of this phenomenon are Bloomberg and Thomson Reuters (where I work). The cash-generating power of Bloomberg’s model is obvious to any visitor to the company’s gleaming Upper East Side headquarters. The centrality of Bloomberg’s eponymous terminals to that enterprise is equally apparent—look up anywhere in the building and chances are you’ll see a screen tracking terminal installations. Some 290,000 Bloomberg clients pay some \$20,000 per year for these boxes full of private news and data.

Most of Bloomberg’s journalistic firepower is poured into those boxes. Over the past twelve months, however, the news operation has made a push into the consumer space: acquiring, rebranding, and redesigning what is now *Bloomberg Businessweek*; revamping Bloomberg TV; and previewing, in beta, a jazzier version of the free Bloomberg Web site.

Feeding the terminals remains the heart of the business

plan. Matt Winkler, the founding editor of Bloomberg News, said that Bloomberg's moves into the consumer space all "increase the awareness of the value of Bloomberg." That awareness, in turn, strengthens the company's core terminal business in two ways. It helps Bloomberg reporters get better access to sources, he says, because as sources become more likely to talk to Bloomberg "the Bloomberg terminal becomes more valuable." Winkler cites a February interview with President Obama—conducted by Bloomberg News veterans Albert Hunt, Julianna Goldman, and Michael Tackett, as well as recently hired *Bloomberg Businessweek* editor Josh Tyrangiel, and unrolled across the company's public Web sites and *Bloomberg Businessweek*—as an example of the access the company's consumer presence hopes to deliver.

Second, the exposure helps sell terminals. Winkler's current favorite illustration is a retired broker named Michael Robbins, who had let his terminal subscription lapse. Robbins so enjoyed a March review—on the free Web site—of the Metropolitan Opera's production of Ambroise Thomas's *Hamlet*, written by arts and leisure editor Manuela Hoelterhoff, that he told me it "was a major catalyst" in his decision to ask his former partners, for whom he is consulting, to renew his subscription.

The Thomson Reuters' model is similar—in fact, the company has been striking a balance between professional and consumer news since its inception nearly a century and a half ago. "At 100,000 feet, the two companies are doing exactly the same thing," said Devin Wenig, CEO of the Thomson Reuters markets division (and my boss's boss). "We have a core news engine that exists for one purpose, and that is to help our clients make money." News supports all of the market division's business, but just \$365 million of the unit's \$7.5 billion in revenue in 2009 came directly from its traditional media and consumer operations (mostly from syndication and its public Web site).

But like Winkler, Wenig thinks a strong consumer presence has helped that core professional business by winning over sources: "It helps us to get access to people that matter." More consumer visibility appeals to reporters, too. "It helps us hire good people," Wenig said, citing Jim Impoco, a former *New York Times* editor who leads enterprise reporting for Reuters in New York.

Edging into the consumer market is appealing for these two private-content firms for one other reason: since they already have the manpower, it is cheap, particularly relative to the cost of business for the legacy players. "If you look at the mastheads of *Bloomberg Businessweek* and *Bloomberg Markets*, there aren't a lot of people there," Winkler notes. But since the magazines are an extension of Bloomberg News, "the reporters in our 148 bureaus around the world" can contribute.

Wenig agreed: "The marginal cost of putting our content into a consumer environment is almost zero. I wouldn't be running a 2,800-person news organization just to build a consumer product, but that is the organization I have."

FOR MASS NEWS ORGANIZATIONS, THE BIG QUESTION IS HOW much news they can pull back behind an online veil. Reu-

ters and Bloomberg grapple with the opposite issue—how much ankle they can expose to a mass audience without reducing the value of the information they offer to their high-paying, private client base. "There are constant discussions about it," Winkler said. "You have to give people just enough so they appreciate what you've done, but not so much that it could in any way replicate a Bloomberg. You put enough scoops in front of people to say, 'That's a great Web site.' But you don't give them every scoop. The time delays are a part of it."

Moving into the consumer space—particularly at a time when legacy consumer media companies are fighting for their financial survival—is a natural step for cash-rich professional, electronic information firms, particularly in the business sector where information can translate into a business advantage. Meanwhile, some legacy print-based news organizations are trying to move in the opposite direction, into the private-news space. One of them is the *Financial Times* (disclosure: where I worked for fifteen years). Increasingly, the *FT* newspaper and Web site are the public, consumer face of a company whose highest margin enterprises are affiliated businesses that sell exclusive information to a niche, professional audience.

John Ridding, CEO of the *FT* and *FT.com* (and my former boss's boss), faces constraints on the price he can charge for his newspaper, but far fewer limits on the price of professional information. Ridding argues that the *FT* and *FT.com* can be profitable on their own, "but these niches, drawing on the value of the brand and their infrastructure, can be extremely profitable. If you go from the newsstand to Medley [a high-end professional analysis service] there is quite a difference in price!"

While most media grapple with what to put behind a paywall, niche news has an opposite puzzle—how much ankle can it expose for free?

"What you have is the reach and the global audience of the *FT* brand that supports and drives these niche publications," he said. "They can be organic, like China Confidential [an electronic newsletter edited by a former *FT* Beijing bureau chief], or they can be acquisitions like Medley or Money Media [an aggregation and reporting service aimed at money managers]." The *FT*'s shift was underscored in May when an executive from Pearson, the *FT*'s owner, told a media conference that within five years the *FT* is likely to have largely abandoned its flagship consumer product, the print edition

of the newspaper—although a Pearson spokesperson said afterwards that was not true.

Straddling the consumer/professional divide can be a stretch. “A lot of the things a consumer news organization is good at, we’re not,” Wenig said. “We are building those muscles.” Building this model from the opposite starting point, the *FT*’s Ridding describes the change from his perspective as one of psychology as well as skills: “This is quite a mindset change for newspapers and for newsrooms. It is a challenge to the very deeply rooted instinct of journalists to want to reach as many people as possible. It may be easier if you are a more specialist publication to begin with. Journalists have to focus more on the quality and depth of their relationship with their readers, rather than pure reach.”

THE PRIVATE/PUBLIC BALANCING ACT HAS ECHOES IN OTHER areas of journalism. One cousin is an older model, the columnist/speaker. Consider Charlie Cook, the political analyst.

Here’s how Cook described his business model: “It is like a stool with four legs. One leg that is twenty-six years old is the *Cook Political Report*. It has two editors and doesn’t cover its costs. It is the research and development part that differentiates me from a lot of windbags in Washington. The second leg is a contract with National Journal Group to write weekly columns for *National Journal* magazine and CongressDailyAM. The third leg is a small contract with NBC. The fourth leg is the speaking circuit, and that is very, very lucrative.”

Speaking at conferences—a high-cost service delivered to a small and exclusive group of clients—is Cook’s equivalent of the private-news businesses of Bloomberg, Thomson Reuters, and the *FT*. His other work, including TV appearances, is the equivalent of the consumer platforms that attract sources and burnish the brands of the big business news organizations. The analogy isn’t perfect—the *Cook Political Report* is a niche business, albeit a loss-making one—but the basic principle is the same. Cook uses his consumer exposure to market the time-honored money-making side of his operation: speeches. And meanwhile, “There is a subsidy taking place,” Cook said. “The speaking subsidizes the journalistic enterprise.”

Chris Anderson, the editor of *Wired* magazine, likes the private/public hybrid idea so much he used it to help build the thesis of his recent book, *Free: The Future of a Radical Price*. Anderson helped spread the term “freemium”—first popularized by New York venture capitalist Fred Wilson—to describe the mix of free and premium (i.e., very expensive) content that he believes is the dominant business model of the Internet age. He practices what he preaches, giving away electronic copies of his book to help build a personal brand he cashes in on by giving speeches.

In-person appearances are a profitable part of the private offerings of bigger news organizations, too. The *FT*’s Ridding says there is “a lot of interest and value in physical engagement. It is a very high margin business.” David Bradley, owner of the Atlantic Media Group, with which Cook is affiliated, told the same story: “The live component is what the really high-end clients are interested in.”

THE QUIET RISE OF COMPANIES AND INDIVIDUALS PURSUING the professional/consumer hybrid should be a source of comfort—but also of some new concerns.

The upside is obvious. The private/public model is financing a lot of expensive-to-produce journalism. Its reach and ambitions are expanding as organizations trying to rework the advertising/subscription model are shrinking. It seeks better-trained journalists at a time when we are bemoaning the disappearance of good-paying journalism jobs.

One possible concern: as any freelancer can tell you, news organizations with an attractive consumer platform have realized they can free-ride on their contributors’ desire to build a consumer presence. Bradley explained: “The HuffPost is the leader, but all of us as followers are on to the same idea that contributors are looking to build their personal brands.” That imperative—which Tina Brown, founding editor of *The Daily Beast*, has described as the “gig” economy—lets companies like The Huffington Post buy freelance content for little or nothing; they are effectively renting space on their consumer platform to writers who hope to monetize that exposure. This deal only works for freelancers who have the profile and entrepreneurial energy to cash in on their personal brands in other ways.

But there is a larger principle at stake with the private/public hybrid, the question of who is journalism for? “All of us have an obligation: What are we doing to make the world a better place—better informed, for instance?” Winkler said. “The Web site goes a long way towards our commitment to the public interest.”

Still, the professional/consumer model only works if a moneyed elite is willing to pay for privileged access to information, whether that is a faster Reuters news flash or richer data on a Bloomberg terminal or a personal audience with a wise-cracking Charlie Cook. Wenig concedes that much of what his clients prize has little impact on the health of the *demos*: “The price of uranium matters a lot to a uranium trader, but it is not of much interest to a wider public.”

Wenig believes that “there has always been an information divide. There has always been a social and capital structure to information.” He’s not sure how the Internet-driven transformation of the media business will influence that divide, but “I can see an argument that says... maybe the Internet is widening it.”

Conventional wisdom says the Internet is making information more widely available, but that it also may be reducing the quality of that information and the number of people—journalists—paid to produce it. But if the professional/consumer model moves further into the news business, perhaps something close to the opposite will be true: more high-quality information will exist, and it will be produced by more well-trained and well-compensated journalists. But their work will be available—first and in the greatest detail—to the small group of people able to pay a lot of money for it. **CJR**

CHRYSTIA FREELAND, the former U.S. managing editor for the Financial Times, is global editor-at-large for Thomson Reuters.

Lone Star Trailblazer

Will the Texas Tribune transform Texas journalism?

BY JAKE BATSELL

A week after the March 2 Texas primary, more than 250 caffeinated Austin insiders gathered in a downtown ballroom for a Q-and-A breakfast with Bill White, the newly crowned Democratic gubernatorial nominee. Policy wonks, political aides, prospective donors, and tweeting journalists sized up White's plainspoken answers as the morning's host, Texas Tribune editor-in-chief and CEO Evan Smith, peppered the former Houston

mayor about whether he can realistically hope to topple Governor Rick Perry, the GOP incumbent.

Two hours later, Smith's reporters were back at their desks, scanning the news coverage of that morning's "Trib-Live" event. The newsroom banter quickly shifted from the candidate's interview to how stories referred to the Tribune itself. "Why is the AP calling us an online news site?" asked Matt Stiles, the Tribune's computer-assisted reporting specialist. Fellow reporter Morgan Smith reminded Stiles that the *Austin American-Statesman* had called the Tribune an "online news service" in previous blog posts. On his way to the copy machine, managing editor Ross Ramsey cracked: "Are we trying to figure out what we are again?"

If they seem a bit oversensitive, it's perhaps understandable. Eight months into a deep-pocketed, high-profile experiment in online journalism, the Tribune is still searching for its journalistic identity—even as it has emerged as a buzzwor-

thy brand on the Texas political scene. The startup ambitiously aims to cover what one internal document calls "the ever-hollowing middle between local and national/international topics," a void created in part by Texas newspapers' shuttering of bureaus statewide. The Tribune is amplifying its traditional journalism with innovative, audience-focused twists—equipping readers with searchable data platforms, hosting events, and promoting itself as a brainy digital club of civic-minded Texans.

I spent nine months scrutinizing the Tribune's business strategies and editorial work, attending its events, talking to its reporters, and listening to the Texas journalism and political communities size up the new kid on the block. And while it is too early to make sweeping judgments about the Tribune, I came away mostly impressed with what I saw. It is clear and serious about its journalism, but it also has a sense of humor and is willing to try new things, fail, and try again—two qualities in painfully short supply at most traditional media outlets. But make no mistake, this is an experiment, and its success is hardly guaranteed. The Tribune has shown a remarkable ability to raise startup cash, but no one is certain where the long-term money will come from. It has drawn a lot of readers, but a huge portion come for the interactive databases of public information that, while undeniably a boon to government transparency, remain unproven in their concrete journalistic benefits. But more on that later. The Tribune is exciting. It has shaken up the state's journalism estab-

lishment. And it is trying to be something at once familiar and altogether new.

A (Lone) Star Is Born

As the news business teetered in late 2006, software investor John Thornton assembled a team of investment pros at Austin Ventures—the largest U.S. venture capital firm not based on one of the coasts—to explore how to profit from the woes of newspapers. "This really started as a search for money," Thornton says. But the more industry research he did, the more he realized that the copious profits that newspapers raked in during the late twentieth century—profits that subsidized public-interest journalism—would never return. Thornton, forty-five, recalls sitting through a particularly "stultifying" business meeting where one strategy bandied about was for newspapers to run more photos of

pets and features about cute couples. "I thought, 'It's been two hours and journalism hasn't been mentioned,'" he says. "That's when the light went on for me that maybe public-service journalism—whatever you want to call it, I call it capital-J journalism... maybe this stuff is a public good just like national defense, clean air, clean water."

From his vantage point as a clear-eyed capitalist, Thornton suddenly saw shoe-leather reporting as something "market forces, left to their own devices, won't produce enough of." So instead of scooping up beleaguered newspapers as distressed assets, Thornton decided to donate \$1 million of his own money to start something new—the Tribune—whose nonpartisan mission, he says, is to help Texans "make more informed decisions about their civic lives." Previously a prominent donor to Democratic causes, Thornton now insists that he has abandoned partisan politics.

For advice on this foray into journalism, Thornton approached his friend Evan Smith, the fast-talking, hyper-connected editor of *Texas Monthly* who guided the magazine to national prominence after arriving in Austin in late 1991 from Condé Nast. As the pair fleshed out the idea for the Tribune, it became clear to both men that Smith should serve as the venture's leader—a process Smith jokingly likens to Dick Cheney appointing himself as George W. Bush's vice president. But Thornton maintains, "I didn't have any interest in doing this with anybody else."

The Tribune announced its intentions in July 2009, billing itself not only as an antidote to the dwindling capitol press corps but also as a new force in Texas political life. Smith rounded up what he describes as a "Justice League" of young reporters, including twenty-eight-year-old Elise Hu, a local TV political reporter and blogger; Pulitzer-winning investigative reporter Brian Thevenot, thirty-eight, of *The Times-Picayune*; and Stiles, thirty-four, the *Houston Chronicle's* reporter of the year in 2007. "They've got the best young journalist crew in Texas," says Wayne Slater, the senior political writer for *The Dallas Morning News*, which lost twenty-nine-year-old Emily Ramshaw, the 2009 Texas Star Reporter of the Year, to the Tribune. The staff has since grown to twenty-one, including twelve reporters and a four-person technology team.

After Thornton plunked down the seed money, the Tribune went on a bipartisan fundraising binge, landing \$150,000 from longtime GOP backer T. Boone Pickens, \$500,000 from the Houston Endowment, and \$250,000 from the Knight Foundation, among other big-ticket donors. Throw in about 1,500 "members" who contributed at least \$50 each, and more than sixty corporate sponsors at roughly \$2,500 a pop, and the Tribune had raised about \$4 million by the end of 2009. Going forward, Thornton hopes to reduce the Tribune's reliance on philanthropy through a strategy he calls "revenue promiscuity": a blend of NPR-style memberships, corporate sponsors, events, and specialty publications. But even as Thornton watches the Tribune's metrics and costs with business-like precision, he clearly regards the enterprise as a higher calling. "God did not put me on this Earth to do more software deals," he told an SPJ banquet crowd in Arlington, Texas, in April.

Is Data Journalism?

On November 3, the Tribune officially launched, "amid a herald of its own trumpets," as *The New York Times's* David Carr wryly noted on Twitter. As the new crew of journalists fanned out to cover primary election season, Smith recalls, a campaign adviser asked one of his reporters how things were going at "the world's most expensive blog." The insinuation, of course, was that the Tribune was just another entrant into Austin's already crowded political blogosphere.

Early traffic figures suggest a broader reach. Of the 1.3 million visits to Texastribune.org during its first six months, Smith says, only about one-fifth originated in Austin. Of the remaining traffic, 20 percent came from other large cities in Texas, 31 percent from the rest of Texas, and 27 percent from outside Texas. The national traffic was padded by one-time hits such as a lead story in *The Huffington Post* and a collaboration with *Newsweek* on a cover story about Governor Perry. By spring, readership was ahead of internal targets. A mid-May readership survey drew 1,060 responses from people describing themselves as well-educated (90 percent have a college degree), politically engaged (98 percent are registered to vote), and upscale (58 percent report a household income of at least \$100,000).

So the numbers are impressive, but the value of what's drawing those numbers—from a journalism standpoint—is less obvious. The Tribune's biggest magnet by far has been its more than three dozen interactive databases, which collectively have drawn three times as many page views as the site's stories. At a recent international online journalism symposium in Austin, that statistic wowed new-media experts as validation that readers prefer data-driven projects to traditional journalism narratives. The databases, developed primarily by Matt Stiles and software engineer Niran Babalola, allow users to search public employees' and teachers' salaries, browse campaign contributions, peruse state-prison inmates' offenses and sentences, and even see how many citations Texas red-light cameras have captured, complete with a Google Maps street view of each intersection. The Tribune publishes or updates at least one database per week, and readers e-mail these database links to each other or share them on Facebook, scouring their neighborhood's school rankings or their state rep's spending habits.



Partners For Batsell's interview with Thornton, left, and Smith, go to www.cjr.org/behind_the_news/lonestar_trailblazer_video.php.

Through May, the databases had generated more than 2.3 million page views since the site's launch.

The databases have been an unexpected hit, supplying readers with access to more than a million public records they otherwise may not have known how to find. They've been so popular, in fact, that the site's biggest initial splash has been not as a fountain of authoritative reporting and analysis, but as a resource for readers to do their own exploring. While that fact may be humbling for reporters, it's part of a "data-as-journalism" mentality that has become the Tribune's most far-reaching calling card. "Publishing data is news," Stiles and Babalola wrote in a May 31 recap of the Tribune's data efforts. "It aligns with our strategy of adding knowledge and context to traditional reporting, and it helps you and us hold public officials accountable."

The Tribune's idealistic stance toward data has the whiff of a familiar claim: if we give the public raw information, people will take the initiative to make sense of it and put it in its proper context. In effect, they will do what journalists have historically done for them. But the scale on which this in fact happens is uncertain, and the inherent journalistic value of raw data remains unclear.

Still, the Tribune clearly is on to something. An April Pew Research Center report found 40 percent of adult Web users have sought out raw data about government spending. In an increasingly clickable, on-demand world, it's almost inevitable that more readers will prefer searchable databases as an alternative to the media's traditional gatekeeping role. I think these databases, properly conceived, can boost government transparency and help create a better-informed public. But until a citizen watchdog or gadfly breaks news with a Texas Tribune database—spotting overspending or exposing a conflict of interest—the Tribune remains open to criticism that the information is mainly "water-cooler gossip," as one irate reader suggested in April.

For instance, the site's government salary database—by far its most popular data application—has sparked some strong reactions and nasty office politics. State hiring managers are irritated that employees now compare salaries with colleagues. Workers are alarmed to see their salaries pop up when they Google themselves. One state employee's wife called Smith to complain that she considers the database not only a violation of privacy but "rape." Smith explains it this way: "A lady is sitting in her cube at a state agency, mad that the woman in the next cube drank the milk in the refrigerator in the break room. And she's on this site realizing that the woman in the next cube makes \$100 a week more than she does. She gets pissed off and is refreshing the database over and over." It's provocative and good for the Tribune's traffic. But is it a public service? The answer may depend on whether your salary is listed.

Meet the Press, Texas-style

When plugging the Tribune across the state, Smith is fond of reminding audiences that personal engagement was the "first platform." And even in a multiplatform world, face time is a major element of the Tribune's growth strategy. Since its

One state employee's wife called Smith to complain that the Tribune's government salary database is not only an invasion of privacy, but 'rape.'

November launch, the Tribune has hosted nearly twenty on-the-record events—breakfast interviews, campus road shows, even a screening of a political documentary about humorist Kinky Friedman's ill-fated gubernatorial campaign.

As the convener of such gatherings, the Tribune aspires to become a player in the political narrative rather than a mere reflector of that narrative, a high-visibility approach that runs counter to that of the state's legacy news organizations. Thornton and Smith even hired a full-time director of events, Tanya Erlach, from *The New Yorker*. Plans are under way for an Ideas Festival modeled on *The New Yorker* Festival.

Most nonprofit news organizations host occasional member events, but few have been as aggressive from the outset as the Tribune, which sees events as a key part of its mission "to promote civic engagement and discourse on public policy, politics, government and other matters of statewide concern."

At most Tribune events, Smith is the emcee, ringmaster, and salesman. Always impeccably dressed in a suit and tie, with hair neatly parted above squared-off, dark-framed glasses, Smith comfortably holds court with his guests and audience, dispensing rapid-fire questions and one-liners. As one young audience member tweeted during a late-April panel discussion: "Is it just me, or does Evan Smith look like a modern day version of a character from *Mad Men*? Dude's intense." Rudy England, an Austin-based political consultant who attended the Bill White event in March, says the early-morning TribLive sessions are more off the cuff than traditional political functions. Interview subjects seem to have their guard down. "It's becoming Texas's version of *Meet the Press*," England says.

And the Tribune's events make money, too, pulling in more than \$150,000 so far through corporate sponsorships, according to Smith. Stories about and videos of all interviews are quickly posted on the site. Sometimes they're even used by political opponents, as White found out in May when Perry's campaign used a TribLive snippet to paint him as a tax-happy liberal. That suits the Texas Tribune just fine, as long as you spell its name right.

Risk and Reward

During his reelection campaign in late October, Governor Perry gave an animated stump speech to the Lake Travis Republican Women's Club in Lakeway, Texas. At the time, the governor may not have fully appreciated that his twenty-two-minute address would soon be scrutinized and irreverently repurposed by the Tribune as part of its Stump Interrupted video series, which applies VH1-style pop-up bubble treatment to candidates' campaign rhetoric. When Perry's speech appeared on the Tribune in mid-November, it included a

'If we're trying to save anything it's Texas—it's not journalism,' says Evan Smith. 'We are not the new model, or the new solution. We may be a new model.'

cheeky "Washington Tally" with a chiming bell and a graphic noting how many times (fifteen) he railed against the tyranny of Washington, D.C. The video also juxtaposed inconvenient facts against Perry's oratory, such as a statistic showing that proportionally more Texans lack health insurance than any other state.

Stump Interrupted, which just won a national Murrow award, is the brainchild of multimedia editor Elise Hu. Smith was initially skeptical of the idea, thinking it might come across as juvenile, but ultimately he let Hu run with it. Hu took that as an early sign that the Tribune newsroom embraces a culture of risk-taking: "Instead of being in a place where I feel like I don't have a lot of control over the hierarchies and bureaucracies that are in place," she says, "here we can say, 'Let's try this. Let's just go ahead and do it, and if it doesn't work, let's fix it.'"

In addition to things like Stump Interrupted, which is a product of the times as much as the technology, the Tribune has injected life into some more traditional newsroom pursuits. Its polls, for instance—including a jaw-dropper, headlined "Meet the Flintstones," that found nearly one-third of Texans believe dinosaurs and humans lived on Earth at the same time—have raised eyebrows from El Paso to Galveston. And while it compiles the day's top state news from other media outlets in its TribWire, it also aggregates tweets from elected officials.

Despite a few temptations, the Tribune has stuck to its niche of politics, government, and public policy. Its report-

ers did not cover breaking news events like November's Fort Hood shootings or a rogue pilot who flew a plane into an Austin IRS building. Of course, steering clear of the day's big story can be difficult for a room full of news junkies: "The hardest part about this is to figure out what you don't do, and then not doing that," says managing editor Ross Ramsey.

Reporters say they feel liberated from the institutional realities at traditional news outlets. As the *El Paso Times's* Austin correspondent, Brandi Grissom once had a quota of ten bylines a week. "There wasn't time to do the kind of reporting that I've been able to do here," says Grissom, thirty-one, who specializes in immigration and border issues.

Robert Rivard, the editor of the *San Antonio Express-News*, who sent the Tribune a check as a founding member, says he can see the payoff of that freedom: "Particularly given the diminished number of newspaper journalists based in Austin, they're reporting stories that otherwise would go unreported." Some of the Tribune's early scoops include a story by Hu detailing how the state's Division of Workers' Compensation spiked investigations of doctors who were overbilling and overtreating patients; a piece by Brian Thevenot that challenged the myth that Texas dictates the content of history textbooks for the rest of the nation; and Emily Ramshaw's investigation into how state teachers repeatedly used physical restraints on students with disabilities.

'Partnership Sluttiness'

The Tribune advocates what Smith calls "content partnership sluttiness," freely offering stories, multimedia projects, and databases to any media outlet that wants them. But at least two of Texas' biggest newspapers—*The Dallas Morning News* and *Austin American-Statesman*—have mostly resisted the Tribune's advances. The *Morning News's* Wayne Slater, one of Austin's best-known political journalists, says he's "bullish" on the Tribune but points to two reasons why some papers have been slow to embrace it. First, in the run-up to the Tribune's launch, Thornton rubbed some newspaper folks the wrong way by insinuating they were outmoded. "When's the last time you read a story about lobbying in state politics?" Thornton was quoted in an *Austin Chronicle* story. "I don't think anybody can say with a straight face that people of Texas are as informed on government today as they were fifty years ago." Slater and *American-Statesman* editor Fred Zipp heard the same message: "His early pitch cast the Tribune as the savior of journalism," Zipp says.

Thornton admits he could have been more diplomatic. "Mea culpa," he says. "I don't blame them—it was a silly thing to say. But if they're really still focused on that, it kind of makes me wonder." Still, he hopes the Tribune eventually can work closely with the Dallas and Austin dailies.

It's unclear when that might happen. In March, Slater told me that while the Tribune is producing worthwhile journalism, few stories are compelling enough to scream syndication. "I can think of very little that the Tribune has provided that makes me think, 'Oh my God, I wish we had had that,'" he said. At about the same time, Zipp told me that there's no edict against collaborating with the Tribune, but

"have they brought anything to the table that's substantially changed the game yet? I don't think so."

For months I wondered why, at a time when cutbacks have forced competing papers all over the country to pool resources and collaborate, these two dailies would not publish a first-rate story like Hu's workers' comp probe or Thevenot's counterintuitive analysis on the textbook controversy? Why would they not want to work with an outfit named the best local news Web site by the Radio Television Digital News Association? Was it simply legacy-media hubris?

Then, in early June, the Tribune teamed up with the *Houston Chronicle* on an exposé that no one could ignore. The Tribune's Emily Ramshaw and the *Chronicle's* Terri Langford produced an investigation into a "fight club" at a state-contracted facility where disabled girls were rewarded with snacks for fighting. The *Morning News* published a truncated version in its state wire section, and the *American-Statesman* put it on its metro cover. Zipp, by way of explanation, called it a story "that could move the needle at the legislature. Rather than try to reinvent the wheel, we felt it made more sense to pick up the story from the Tribune."

The piece makes clear that if the Tribune continues to produce high-impact journalism, then hard feelings, old-school attitudes about competition, or whatever, will dissolve and the distribution of good work will take care of itself. Increasingly, such collaborative efforts are producing important journalism across the country, from the Pulitzer-winning *New York Times Magazine*-ProPublica piece that chronicled the life-and-death decisions at one hospital in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, to the promising teamwork profiled in the May/June issue of *CJR* by the news outlets working with the investigative nonprofit California Watch.

Zipp freely admits that the Tribune's arrival has ignited his newsroom's competitive juices. The *American-Statesman* has ramped up its state coverage—in January, the paper began partnering with the Pulitzer-winning PolitiFact franchise, a *St. Petersburg Times* project that judges the truth of public officials' statements. It also has increased marketing efforts to highlight the paper's statehouse reporting team. "I think anything we do to beef up our state coverage is at least in part a response to the Tribune," Zipp says. "There's no question that the existence of the Tribune has made us better, and caused us to think about what we do in different ways." As the Tribune has evolved, Zipp has come to regard it as both competitor and contributor: "We're all drifting into a better understanding of each other's needs and strengths."

Bob Mong, the *Morning News's* editor, recently told me that his paper will publish Tribune stories when they meet the *News's* standards for impact. "I'm eager to work with them, under the right circumstances," he says.

For his part, Smith says it's misguided to frame the question of whether to accept the Tribune's content as a binary choice. "This is not A or B. It's additive. It's A and B," he says. "We can either hang separately or survive together. I hope those guys will work with us." Meanwhile, the Tribune may soon expand its reach in the print market—*The New York Times* confirmed that it has discussed a partnership with the

Tribune. The *Times* has introduced local editions in Chicago and the San Francisco Bay Area.

But Is It Sustainable?

After the fundraising bonanza that accompanied its launch, the Tribune is still raising money at a healthy clip, pulling in around \$600,000 so far in 2010. But Thornton, who is pushing the Tribune to wean itself from philanthropy, says building grassroots support "is what keeps me up at night." It's what keeps everyone involved in a journalism startup awake at night. How do we sustain these creatures?

In light of this, I asked Smith if his salary—\$315,000—has led to a perception problem for a fledgling nonprofit with a populist message. "Populist? What am I, Eugene Debs?" Smith says. "What is this, like a Socialist Party summer camp? You think (NPR's) Vivian Schiller is not being paid a lot of money? You think (ProPublica's) Paul Steiger is not being paid a lot of money?... I haven't heard boo about it since the first week of the Tribune." Perhaps not, but it's only prudent to anticipate that high CEO salaries at the Tribune and peers like ProPublica (Steiger makes \$570,000) and the new Bay Citizen (Lisa Frazier makes \$400,000) might, by themselves, present a sustainability challenge for nonprofit news sites down the road. It certainly sharpens the pressure on these CEOs to raise money—as Smith actively does, traveling the state to meet potential donors at least once a week.

New Texas Tribune publisher Michael Sherrod, formerly an AOL executive, is devising a strategy to expand across the state by building communities of Tribune members and content partners in the state's counties, towns, and cities. And with 254 counties in Texas, the Tribune has plenty of room to grow. Which raises the question: Can this journalistic model be replicated? What other state has Texas's size, wealth, and shared sense of identity, along with a well-networked, passionate evangelist like Smith? "That same self-shared bond, shared experience, is crucial to the potential success of the Tribune, in that no matter where you live in Texas, what happens in Texas, you care about it," Smith says. "I don't know that we could have launched the New Hampshire Tribune.

"If we're trying to 'save' anything, it's Texas, it's not journalism," he adds. "We are not *the* new model or *the* new solution. We may be *a* new model."

So after all that, we're back where we started, with the Tribune's effort to define itself. To assess an evolving news experiment like the Tribune, we can't rely exclusively on old models for journalistic success. It is trying to be something familiar—a political news outlet and watchdog—as well as something altogether new—an interactive resource that seeks to empower readers and engage them as fellow citizens. It's also a town square with a twist, leading public conversation and providing a virtual and traditional forum for politics and policy. Whatever you call it, the Tribune has brought new energy to the Texas media world. The readers will ultimately decide whether it is a renewable resource. **CJR**

JAKE BATSELL, a former Dallas Morning News reporter and videographer, is an assistant professor of journalism at Southern Methodist University.



End of an era Scenes from *The Star-Ledger* on December 31, 2008, when sixty-eight people left the paper.

After the Storm

What happens to the journalists
who get pushed out of their newsrooms?

BY LISA ANDERSON

As of early June, Paper Cuts, a blog that keeps track of announced buyouts and layoffs at newspapers, counted a total of 32,578 jobs lost since the beginning of 2008. Other estimates are more conservative, but they're all disturbing. For major U.S. newspapers it is as if a dark angel swept through, taking out experience and institutional memory. And people. What happens to them? Lisa Anderson, a CJR Encore Fellow who herself took a 2008 buyout from the Chicago Tribune, focused on one daily, The Star-Ledger of Newark, and found a variety of answers to that question, some of them surprising.

The Star-Ledger, New Jersey's largest and most influential newspaper, once enjoyed what reads like a newsprint version of a fairy tale. Employees received free medical coverage for themselves and their families. Management made the stunning pledge that nonunion staffers would never be laid off because of an economic downturn or technological advance, as long as the paper rolled off the presses. Family ownership seemed to foster a family atmosphere at a daily that in recent years was aggressive and high in quality. Star-Ledger journalists heard the horror stories unfolding at other papers as the 2000s progressed, but generally were spared that kind of agony. Pay raises disappeared after 2005, but money never seemed to be a major impediment to newsgathering. Some employees felt the Ledger had a special place in the affections of Donald Newhouse, president of the Newhouse family-owned Advance Publications Inc., who worked in the newspaper's downtown building for more than forty years. Several

journalists said they should have known something was up when they stopped seeing Donald regularly at the paper.

Adept at hard-hitting investigations and renowned for its sports coverage, the Ledger was a destination paper for many Garden State journalists. It didn't maintain its own network of national and foreign bureaus, but it didn't shy away from sending reporters to follow the story, from Boise to Baghdad. After the appointment of former New York Daily News editor Jim Willse as editor in 1995, the paper won its first Pulitzer Prize, in 2001, for feature photography. A second, for breaking news, followed in 2005, for staff coverage of the resignation of Jim McGreevy, the governor who announced that he was gay and party to an adulterous affair with a male lover. The Ledger, with a current weekday circulation of 236,000 and 360,000 on Sundays, may have been among the happier newsrooms in America.

On July 31, 2008, however, the publisher at the time, George E. Arwady, told the staff that the paper was in much bigger trouble than many of them had imagined. It was, as he put it, "on life support." And unless 200 nonunion people—or about 40 percent of the staff—signed up for a voluntary buyout and unless the mailers' and drivers' unions granted concessions by October 1, he told the gathered employees, The Star-Ledger would be sold. If not sold it would be closed by January 2009.

It was decision time. Many members of the staff had served the paper for decades. But the buyouts were "voluntary" in name only, many former

employees point out, as the company nudged and prodded many people to leave (layoffs had been ruled out at that point, due to Advance's longstanding and unusual job-security pledge to nonunion employees at all its newspapers). Married staff members—there were several—say they were counseled to accept at least one buyout. Meanwhile, Arwady warned that the loss of more than a third of the staff would radically change life at the paper for those who stayed. Everyone who took a buyout would receive a year's pay at the 2007 level and free medical benefits for a year. Employees over the age of fifty-five with ten or more years of service would receive free medical coverage for life—a serious consideration since, management made clear, after the buyout deadline all bets were off.

Employees who chose the buyout didn't know it then, but they would be leaving in the teeth of the worst recession since the Great Depression, a crisis even more pronounced

in the journalism universe. Tears and wine flowed in the *Star-Ledger* newsroom on December 31, 2008, as the last of the buyouts packed up their desks. In the end, out of a 334-person full-time newsroom staff, 151 people left. From its peak of 366 in 2000, *The Star-Ledger* newsroom's full-time staff currently stands at 190.

Employees who remained—after a handful of further departures in 2009—faced more work for less money. In March 2009, they learned that their pensions were frozen and that they would be furloughed for ten days a year. In May came salary cuts: 5 percent on the first \$40,000, 10 percent on the next \$40,000, and 15 percent on anything over \$80,000. Employees began paying 25 percent of their health care plans. There were also reassignments, including the transfer of a reporter and an assistant deputy photo editor who had resisted the buyouts, to the mailroom. Willse retired in October, succeeded by managing editor Kevin Whitmer. On February 5, 2010, the legendary job security pledge ended.

Beyond the cement and glass walls of the hulking *Star-Ledger* headquarters, the fortunes of its diaspora are mixed. Some have launched new news ventures: ex-*Ledger* reporters launched the non-profit NewJerseyNewsroom.com in April 2009, with no financial backing and no offices but with forty writers volunteering to provide news about New Jersey. The

Here are the stories of six *Star-Ledger* journalists and the paths they found:

Wayne Woolley

Back Into Uniform



Wayne Woolley had just stepped off a military transport plane in Fort Bliss, Texas, on July 31, 2008, when he got the news. The *Star-Ledger* military affairs and defense reporter, preparing for his third embed in Iraq covering the New Jersey National Guard, turned on his cell phone to find five voice-mails. They all said the same thing: *The Star-Ledger* was in critical condition.

One of the messages came from Woolley's wife, fellow *Ledger* reporter Judy DeHaven, who filled him in on that morning's chilling newsroom announcement. Suddenly, Woolley said, it seemed like "the bottom dropped out" in terms of their professional lives, and in the wider world of journalism as well. Both took the buyout.

The couple had joined *The Star-Ledger* in 2000 after four years at *The Detroit News*, where Wayne covered the police and Judy chronicled suburban crime. They wanted to come back to the East Coast, and the *Ledger* was one of the few papers that would hire couples.

It was an exciting time to be there, too. Under editor Jim Willse, "All of a sudden the paper was lively and aggressive. It was fun to read and they were clearly, clearly just trying to hire good people," said Woolley. The paper encouraged him to treat the military affairs story as a national beat, traveling around the country and overseas to cover soldiers, sailors, and airmen, whose stories he "loved telling."

Now what? Woolley and his wife, parents of two small children, looked beyond journalism. DeHaven, a former business writer, eventually landed a job as a financial writer at an investment service. Woolley thought public affairs might be fulfilling, but only if it was for something he could believe in. An obvious answer was the military.

By the end of November 2008 he landed a temporary job in the public affairs office of the New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, which was swamped with work following the deployment of nearly 3,000 Army National Guard soldiers to Iraq. Woolley said the tasks there came naturally to him after covering the military for six years, and after spending eight years before that in the Army Reserve after going through Penn State on an ROTC scholarship.

But to have a shot at keeping the job permanently, he would have to be a person in uniform. Due to his prior service, the National Guard would take him—but only if the forty-two-year-old could pass the physical. To do that, he had to lose fifty pounds and get in shape. Through the power of vegetables and exercise, he did it. These days he sports a military haircut along with the fatigues he wears to his office in Lawrenceville.

He uses a lot of his old expertise writing for the department's external and internal publications as well as press releases and occasional op-ed pieces. But Woolley says he's

The news life 'haunts me from time to time, like a phantom limb.'

cooperative site draws advertising, but not yet enough to support anyone, according to former *Star-Ledger* sportswriter and editor Garrett Morrison, one of the founders. While journalists dip in and out, the mainstay is former longtime *Star-Ledger* statehouse reporter Tom Hester Sr., who often writes several times a day. At sixty-six, he said, he has no plans to stop being a reporter. And in May 2010, NJ Spotlight, another online news service founded by *Star-Ledger* alumni and focused on public issues, began publishing from rented space at the Trenton statehouse. NJ Spotlight secured start-up funds from the Community Foundation of New Jersey, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, and the William Penn Foundation, and is the brainchild of former *Star-Ledger* writers John Mooney and Tom Johnson. They are building a roster of freelancers among their former colleagues. "It's a great feeling to be back in the game," said Mooney.

A handful of *Ledger* alumni have landed in traditional media, including *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, Bloomberg News, The Associated Press, and business newsletters. Some have left journalism and started a variety of new careers. Others are still looking. Some are happy. Many say they still miss their former life at *The Star-Ledger*, which, as former assistant metro editor Joanne Sills put it, is "severed and gone but haunts me, from time to time, like a phantom limb."

also learning about desktop publishing, photography, newsletter and video production, and about how to make a budget. "A lot of new skills," he said. "You can't beat it."

Susan Alai

When Experience Hurts



Over three decades as a writer and journalist, Susan Alai welcomed the challenges that came along. She covered politics as a cub reporter at the *Daily Advance* in Dover, New Jersey; interviewed Yves Saint Laurent in Paris for *Women's Wear Daily*; profiled Prince

Albert in Monaco for *W* magazine; and supervised multiple sections as lifestyle editor at *The Star-Ledger*.

But nothing prepared her for the discouraging realities of job loss in an exceedingly bad economy at the age of fifty-six. For the first time in her adult life, Alai, who took the 2008 buyout after eleven years at the *Ledger*, is out of work. Worse, like many among the thousands of unemployed journalists, she is confronting the problems that age can pose in the job marketplace. "I don't think the experience, which goes along with age, is valued anymore," she says, sitting in her suburban Morristown living room.

The decision to take the buyout was painful, she says, and the pressure to leave was formidable. "We knew nothing good was going to come of it, but you had to get out. They were firing bullets at you." But the problems facing older journalists, she says, are uniquely frustrating in a contracting industry that appears to want younger workers for lower pay. "There are so many Baby Boomers who need to be reinvented, and it's not just journalists. Where are you going to find something else to do?"

Alai, youthful and energetic, is married to an attorney and is the mother of an adult daughter. She has looked steadily for full-time work since leaving the *Ledger*, to no avail. She has also freelanced—for *The New York Times*, the MorristownGreen.com local news site, and *Inside Jersey* magazine, a monthly owned by Advance Publications, as well as *New Jersey Life* and *NewJerseyNewsroom.com*. But she notes that the freelance market is shrinking along with its compensation.

So far, numerous applications for magazine and public relations jobs have produced nothing—often not even an acknowledgment, she says. Alai considered becoming a teacher, but the prospect of investing time and money in education courses and state certification seemed questionable at a time when many school districts are shedding experienced teachers.

She has found ways to use her skills in community service. Alai is on the Community Health Advisory Board for Morristown Memorial Hospital and works on the publicity committee for hospital fundraisers. She has become involved with the Rotary Club of Morristown, where she writes for the newsletter, and she recently helped raise money for Haiti earthquake relief. "It gets you away from thinking about yourself—'Poor me, I have no career because my industry

After the Ledger: A CJR Survey

These are responses to a survey sent via the Star-Ledger Alumni Association Facebook Page as well as pass-alongs to staff members who left the paper in and after the 2008 buyout. Number of respondents: 33 (151 left in the 2008 buyout, and several more after that).

—Lisa Anderson

Under what circumstances did you leave The Star-Ledger?

- 29 Chose voluntary buyout
- 3 Encouraged by supervisor to take buyout
- 1 Left voluntarily without a buyout
- 0 Laid off

Has the loss of the job affected your family's finances negatively?

- 21 Yes
- 12 No

Are you and your family on sound financial footing?

- 25 Yes
- 7 No
- 1 Not Sure

Are you working?

- 21 Full-time
- 8 Freelancing only
- 3 Part-time
- 1 Not working

If you are working, are you working in journalism? ¹

- 19 No
- 13 Yes

If you're not working in journalism, are you working in a related field, such as public relations? ²

- 15 Yes
- 4 No

Are you considering or have you already begun early retirement?

- 29 No
- 4 Yes

Do you feel less or more secure about your life since leaving The Star-Ledger?

- 13 Less
- 12 Same
- 8 More

If you are employed, how would you describe your level of satisfaction compared with your experience at The Star-Ledger? ¹

- 11 Same
- 10 More
- 7 Less
- 4 No Response

Do you want to remain in journalism?

- 16 Yes
- 9 No
- 8 No response

On a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high), how much faith do you have that The Star-Ledger will survive?

- 4 1
- 7 2
- 14 3
- 6 4
- 2 5

On a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high), how much faith do you have that newspapers will survive?

- 5 1
- 7 2
- 13 3
- 4 4
- 4 5

1 Of the 32 working full-time, part-time, or freelance

2 Of the 19 not working in journalism

collapsed," she said. "For these people in Haiti, their world literally did collapse."

Chandra Hayslett

An Unexpected Gift



For Memphis-born Chandra Hayslett, journalism was a calling, education reporting a passion, and New Jersey the place she wanted to make her career. So in January 2003, when Dick Hughes, her former editor at Gannett's *Home News Tribune* in East Brunswick, New Jersey, asked her if there was anyone, anywhere he could call for her before he retired, Hayslett knew the answer.

"I said, 'You know what? I really love New Jersey. I want to stay in New Jersey. Can you call *The Star-Ledger*?' At the time Hayslett, thirty-five and full of can-do spirit, was a municipal reporter at Gannett's *Asbury Park Press*. As a young reporter at *The Home News* (the paper merged with *The News Tribune* in 1996), she had competed against more seasoned *Ledger* reporters, admired the quality of their writing, and envied the resources the paper offered. *The Ledger* "was the destination paper."

Hayslett joined the *Ledger* in September 2003, covering twenty-four school districts from the Middlesex County bureau. She loved the job. By the beginning of 2008, however, staff cuts made a dedicated education reporter an unaffordable luxury in the bureau and Hayslett was reassigned to a municipal beat, which she didn't enjoy as much. And after three years without raises it was clear to her that the industry was in trouble. When the buyout was offered, she took it. Her husband is an engineer and they have no children; she decided she could afford to go, and did so on December 10, 2008.

"I thought I was marketable," she says, "but I probably applied for 300 jobs and went on three interviews in 2009." She notes that her eleven years of experience exceeded the requirement for many of the jobs she sought.

So she considered public relations. She started Hayslett Media Consulting from her home in February 2009 and picked up some clients, though not enough to live on. In March, while still looking for full-time work, she decided to volunteer a couple of days a week—press releases and clerical work—at her church, the 6,000-member First Baptist Church of Lincoln Gardens in Somerset. It was partly just to get out of the house. She also thought her politically connected pastor, a former New Jersey secretary of state named DeForest B. Soaries Jr., might be able to help in her job hunt. But he was so busy that for eight months Hayslett never even saw him in the office.

When she finally did, she gave him her résumé. "He called me that afternoon and said I need you on my team," Hayslett said, still excited at the memory. "I started January 4th."

Hayslett is director of communications and marketing for First Baptist and its affiliated Central Jersey Community Development Corp., which runs five nonprofits that deal with such issues as housing assistance and foster care. "This is a gift from heaven, this job. I mean literally—it's the church," she said. "I loved journalism. I had a great run in journalism.

I never thought I would be this happy after journalism. But I'm happier."

Brad Parks

'A Pretty Wonderful Floor'



Brad Parks got his first byline on November 5, 1988, covering a high school hockey game for *The Ridgefield Press* in Connecticut. He was fourteen.

"I fell in love. I fell hard and absolutely. Journalism was what I was going to do with my life. What always amazed me

was the number of people in the newsroom who had the exact same story," says Parks. A former sportswriter and investigative reporter at *The Star-Ledger*, he took the buyout in 2008.

After college and a stint at *The Washington Post*, Parks followed his future wife to New Jersey and found a "dream job" in 1998 at the *Ledger*, where he joined the sports enterprise desk. But after his marriage in 2004, he realized that spending 100 nights a year in a hotel room probably wasn't compatible with having a family.

In November 2004, he switched to investigative news, a move that eventually would change his life. His first story involved a Thanksgiving weekend quadruple homicide in Newark. In a bloodstained vacant lot was a scene that would stay with him. While his wife labored at her graduate work, Parks started work on a novel that began with a quadruple homicide investigated by Carter Ross, an intrepid young reporter for the *Newark Eagle-Examiner*, a paper that bears a strong resemblance to *The Star-Ledger*. The WASP-y Ross also bears a resemblance to the thirty-five-year-old Parks. "He's some idealized version of me. In essence, he has become the vessel for my unrequited journalistic desires," Parks says. "I don't get to do the stuff Carter does anymore and, frankly, I miss it."

Even before the buyout, Parks says, he had realized he would have to leave the *Ledger*. The epiphany came in late 2007, after he had turned in an award-winning series on the fortieth anniversary of the Newark race riots, an event that vastly altered the city. Parks asked for a raise, though there had been a pay freeze on for two years. When he was denied, he says, "that was the beginning of the end."

Slowly, he realized that "the things I loved about my job weren't going to be possible anymore." Parks and his wife Melissa decided to go for what they had always considered "the nuclear option" if things got really bad. A guidance counselor, Melissa began looking for a position at a boarding school, with the idea that they could live rent-free and Parks could write.

By the spring of 2008, she found one, at a school in Virginia's Tidewater region. By July, Parks had a two-book deal from the Minotaur imprint of St. Martin's Publishing Group. By the end of the year, he had left *The Star-Ledger*.

These days, he is the stay-at-home father of two young children and writes his Carter Ross mysteries in a 1,200-square-foot cottage on a bucolic campus. "That's really how we're able to survive. We couldn't do this if we were still living in New Jersey, with an expensive mortgage and all of that stuff,"



A changed place Charles Cooper, a production editor, in his office on a day full of farewells.

Parks says on a recent spring morning. He was on his way from Virginia to a book convention in Ohio.

Faces of the Gone, his debut novel, came out in December 2009. *Eyes of the Innocent* is due out in February 2011. He's completed and sold a third yet-untitled book in the series.

Parks deeply misses the camaraderie of the newsroom but is sanguine. "The elevator that had taken our careers steadily upward had stopped," he says, "but it let me out on a pretty wonderful floor."

Matt Rainey and Michelle Segall-Rainey

Getting Diversified



Neither Matt Rainey, a photographer, nor his wife, Michelle Segall-Rainey, a former photo assignment editor, ever wanted to leave *The Star-Ledger*. But with three children to support, by the time the 2008 buyout came around they felt they needed safer ground.

Michelle, who spent nine years at the *Ledger*, left in December and soon began a one-year college program to become a paralegal. Matt's feature photography had won the *Star-Ledger's* first Pulitzer Prize, in 2001, for an emotional series on the recovery of burn victims from a dorm fire at Seton Hall. He stayed on at the paper, which he had joined in 1995.

But he also founded his own photography/videography business. After the buyout announcement, the couple also worked hard to make themselves more financially secure in case the situation at *The Star-Ledger* worsened—cutting expenses, paying off their car, and even putting their spacious suburban house on the market before they concluded they could still afford it. Matt also continued to teach photojournalism at Kean University. "We came to the conclusion that being diversified was the best thing to do," he says.

Michelle, who is forty-seven, had always been interested in the law, and she knew that paralegals were in demand. She enrolled in the training program at a local community college, juggling school, a part-time job, and childcare (she and Matt, forty-three, have a young son together, and Matt has two children by a prior marriage). She graduated, winning an award for academic excellence along the way, and landed a job as a contract analyst with publisher Rodale Inc. in March 2010. "They're another family-owned company," she says, sitting at her dining-room table. "Rodale will be the happy ending to my one-and-a-half years of tumult."

For Matt, who grew up delivering *The Star-Ledger*, leaving the paper is something he doesn't even want to consider. "I'm Matt Rainey, staff photographer at *The Star-Ledger*," he says, laughing. "It's just that I'm also Matt Rainey, wedding photojournalist. Matt Rainey, corporate editorial photographer. Matt Rainey, freelance photographer. And Matt Rainey, juggler of chain saws."

The freelance work and teaching are crucial, he says, to make up for the pay cuts both he and Michelle have taken in their jobs, as well as the ten-day annual furloughs imposed by the paper.

Still, *The Star-Ledger* and New Jersey continue to constitute his identity. "One of the things that I pride myself on, and certainly one of the things that I hold most dear about the Pulitzer, is that I did it in New Jersey. I didn't travel to Africa or Iraq or some foreign country and shoot some extravagant foreign story. I've done a lot of that and it's wonderful and incredibly exciting.

"But I'm a community journalist," he says. "That's how I grew up, that's how I was trained. My first job was working for a small weekly newspaper. What I love the most about it is that I'm telling the stories of the people in my community and the stories that affect their lives."

And is that possible in the future? "I'm in the I don't-know-part," he says. "I hope so." **CJR**





Ideas + Reviews

SECOND READ

The Ordinary Jungle

A not-so-awed explorer who was unafraid to say so

BY JUSTIN PETERS

In April 1925, a fifty-seven-year-old British explorer named Percy Harrison Fawcett trooped into the Brazilian jungle for the last time. Fawcett had spent much of his adult life under mosquito netting there, and he had become convinced that the region held the remnants of a great lost city—the stronghold of a vanished civilization. Hobbled by age and by poverty, he nonetheless convinced his financial backers to give him one last chance to prove his claims. Equipped with little except a reputation as the man whom the jungle could not kill, Colonel Fawcett and two younger companions set off on a path that would lead them deep inside the remote and rugged region known as Mato Grosso. The party was never heard from again.

Over the next several years, the world press speculated wildly on Fawcett's fate. He had been murdered by hostile Indians; he was being held prisoner; he had lost his mind and gone native; he had been made into a god. Seven years after the explorer's disappearance, a young British journalist set out to find him.

Peter Fleming wasn't the first to go looking for Fawcett, but he was almost certainly the least prepared. A twenty-five-year-old literary editor at the *Spectator*, recently graduated from Oxford, he was a man of the pen, not the machete. He had a taste for adventure, as young men do, but had indulged it sparingly, and had little experience with map-making, Portuguese-speaking, piranha-avoiding, or any other skill that might prove useful in the jungle. His companions—wealthy sons of Eton, men of good breeding and bad judgment—were similarly young and green. "There are, I suppose, expeditions and expeditions," wrote Fleming, and "it looked as if ours was not going to qualify for either category."

Of the expedition, the best that can be said is that nobody died. Fleming and his cohort were slowed at the first when they arrived in the middle of a revolution, and slowed later on by argument and insurrection. Their cartographic ambitions were thwarted when they ditched their surveying equipment, finding it too heavy to carry. They found neither the lost colonel nor his lost city, although they did encounter assorted missionaries, Dutchmen, and "young men of good birth from São Paulo." As Fleming put it: "Beyond the completion of a 3,000-mile journey, mostly under amusing conditions, through a little-known part of the world, and the discovery of one new tributary to a tributary to a tributary of the Amazon, nothing of importance was achieved."

It did, however, produce *Brazilian Adventure*, Fleming's enduring account of the misbegotten journey, which made it all worthwhile. A best-seller upon its initial appearance, the book stayed in print for decades on the strength of Flem-

ing's pungent wit and observational powers.

Almost eighty years later, the book is nearly forgotten, and Fleming's reputation has been eclipsed by that of his brother, Ian, the creator of James Bond. In David Grann's recent *The Lost City of Z*, which introduced the Fawcett story to a new generation, Fleming merits only one direct mention. But in its day, *Brazilian Adventure* was hugely influential. With a journalist's eye and an ironist's heart, Fleming wrote plainly and honestly about his misadventures, his unprecedented candor and self-deprecation reinvigorating a literary genre that too often trafficked in banality, fatuity, and romantic bombast.

"Truth is a perishable commodity; considerable care must be exercised in shipping it across the world," wrote Fleming. The first truly modern travelers' narrative, *Brazilian Adventure* treated the hazards of the jungle as a matter for comedy rather than terror, and suggested that the strangest things about faraway, desperate lands were often the men who rushed over to explore them.

TO CALL PETER FLEMING AN UNLIKELY adventurer is to misunderstand the era in which he was raised. Indeed, for that era, he was as likely an adventurer as anyone else. Born to wealthy parents in 1907, Fleming grew up in the sort of bourgeois mercantile comfort that he would spend much of his life actively escaping. At Eton and Oxford, he won fame writing for student publications and acting in amateur theatricals. (His biographer, Duff Hart-Davis, mentions an unconvincing Iago, for which Fleming employed a bizarre staccato cadence straight out of a pulp detective movie.) In the fall of 1929, his mother commandeered him into a Wall Street position. Fleming sailed for New York, arriving just in time for the collapse of the markets and the rise of the hobo-based economy. Things just got worse after this inauspicious start, and he returned to England the next year, cheerfully leaving business behind forever.

After a brief idle spell, Fleming found work at the *Spectator*. At the time, the long-lived weekly magazine was known for its sterling reputation, but not for its

Fleming and his companions reached São Paulo just as revolution was breaking out in Brazil—which, characteristically, they did not notice.

editorial energy. The job turned out to be an awkward fit. Hart-Davis writes that Fleming "began producing articles of such incisive wit and cynicism that the older hands on the paper became seriously alarmed." His bosses were perhaps relieved when Fleming informed them that he had been selected as an honorary secretary for a British trade mission to China, and would require a four-month leave of absence. He returned to England the next year and resumed his blithe assault on the *Spectator's* masthead, inventing a contributor named "Walter B. Tizzard" and using the name to sign a series of opinionated reviews. But the China trip made him hunger for more adventurous pastimes.

And so he devoured a notice in the *Times of London* in April 1932, promising adventure and amusement in the wilds of Brazil. "It is easy to attract public attention to any exploit which is at once highly improbable and absolutely useless," wrote Fleming. The advertisement, which ran in the paper's "Agony Column" devoted to missing relatives and friends, seemed to fall into both categories: "Exploring and sporting expedition, under experienced guidance, leaving England June, to explore rivers Central Brazil, if possible ascertain fate Colonel Fawcett; abundance game, big and small; exceptional fishing; ROOM TWO MORE GUNS; highest references expected and given."

Fleming felt that the ad had "the right improbable ring to it." Today, its clipped and credulous pomposity reads as an artifact of the golden age of dilettante exploration. Adventure travel, of course, has always been a romantic's pursuit. Yet such romantics were unusually thick on the ground during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Weaned on the melodramatic novels of H. Rider Haggard, flush with the

free time and money granted to those on the right side of the industrial age, these men trekked across the lesser-known continents, hoisting the standards of geography, and ethnology, and science, however loosely defined.

"Nowadays, being an explorer is a trade, which consists not, as one might think, in discovering hitherto unknown facts after years of study, but in covering a great many miles and assembling lantern-slides or motion pictures, preferably in colour, so as to fill a hall with an audience for several days in succession," lamented the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, who would himself visit Mato Grosso a few years after Fleming. Such explorers did win significant fame, bestowed indiscriminately by a pre-mass-media public eager for exotica. Their travels were lauded—and often financed—by the press, which knew that danger porn sold newspapers. Their findings, most of the time, were of very little practical use.

Even so, these travelers were generally quite serious about their own ambitions, as if their efforts to map some irrelevant river put them in the same class as Pizarro or Cortés. The books that resulted from their South American travels were cut from the same dull cloth. In 1913, having failed to win the presidency as the candidate of the Bull Moose Party, an aged and remarkably ill-prepared Theodore Roosevelt set out on a Brazilian expedition. His book, *Through the Brazilian Wilderness*, explained how he had plumbed the darkest interior, inspired the government to spruce up the Rio da Dúvida with a new name (Rio Roosevelt), and faced down the deadly piranha: "The rabid, furious snaps drive the teeth through flesh and bone. The head with its short muzzle, staring malignant eyes, and gaping, cruelly armed jaws, is the embodiment of evil ferocity;

and the actions of the fish exactly match its looks." ("All one can say," writes John Ure in *Trespassers on the Amazon*, "is that his companions did not begrudge him his final fling.")

Roosevelt was preceded by the flamboyant writer and explorer Henry Savage Landor, who, according to David Grann, roamed the Brazilian interior "dressed as if he were heading off to a luncheon in Piccadilly Circus." Landor's own *Across Unknown South America* combines a bluff and imperious tone with the narrative verve of a shipping manifest. When not describing the scenery in slide-show fashion or endlessly marking the changes in elevation, the author complains of the country's inadequate accommodations and the "contemptible imbeciles" with whom he was forced to travel. Landor's men "mutinied and nearly shot him," writes Grann; any of us would have done the same.

Most relevant to Fleming's ambitions was G. M. Dyott, an Englishman who, in 1928, led a widely publicized expedition to find the vanished Colonel Fawcett. *Man Hunting in the Jungle*, his account of the trip, is written from the perspective of someone who very much wants you to know how much he suffered while in transit. Dyott sets the tone with the frontispiece, a ominous photograph of tangled vines captioned, "The Jungle greets you with a Hangman's Noose." He takes enormous pleasure in listing the hazards that he faced, noting early on that "some jungle malady may grip your flabby body from within and snuff out life quicker than the wind disposes of a lighted candle." It is tedious stuff, and the reader occasionally wishes that Dyott's prediction had come true.

PETER FLEMING WAS NOT AT ALL this sort of person. But he was greatly amused by those who were. And so he signed onto the expedition as a special correspondent for the *Times*. After securing a book contract and recruiting a companion—a lanky surveyor and Oxford grad named Roger Pettiward, who would later find fame as a cartoonist under the pseudonym Paul Crum—Fleming left his job at the *Spectator* ("the act of a madman," he put it) and headed for Brazil with high spirits and low expectations.

The party sailed in the late spring of 1932, toting shotguns, revolvers, tear-gas bombs, a bull mastiff named Boris, a gramophone, the organizer's father, the organizer's father's chauffeur, and several obsolete maps. At first, finding Fawcett was a secondary goal of the expedition. In fact, most members of Fleming's party were under the impression that they were on a simple hunting trip. But after docking in Rio, Fleming insisted everyone sign a "gentleman's agreement" asserting that their primary objective was to locate the missing colonel, to which his fellows uneasily assented. ("We shared a working knowledge of firearms, and a more or less keen interest in the habits of wild animals and birds: but by no stretch of the imagination could ours be considered a scientific expedition," wrote organizer Robert Churchward in his apologetic account of the journey, *Wilderness of Fools*.)

The book seems entirely real, even in its silliest moments.

Fleming and his companions reached São Paulo just as a revolution was breaking out in Brazil—which, characteristically, they did not notice. As the author recounts:

When we got back to our hotel, they told us there had been a revolution. . . . None of us had had any previous experience of revolutions; but from all we had heard of them, to be in the middle of one and not to know anything about it until eighteen hours after it had started seemed to argue a certain want of perspicacity.

The expedition soon met up with its Brazil-based guide, a limping and blustery Australian with a fierce hatred of the press. Major Pingle, as Fleming dubbed him, is an enduring comic creation. Unaware that the expedition members had a real interest in tracking Colonel Faw-

cett, and unwilling to help them do so when he realized their intentions, Major Pingle led Fleming and his party a short ways into the jungle before announcing that he would go no further, ostensibly for reasons of safety.

Fleming would have none of it. Determined to bring a good story back for the *Times*, he and a few other men broke off from the group and marched toward the area where they had reason to believe that Fawcett was last seen. They found nothing. Then, running out of food and fearing the start of the rainy season, they turned back and rejoined the rest of the party. Pingle, furious at their earlier defection, gave them a mere ten pounds to fund their thousand-mile trip back to Belém, on the banks of the Amazon estuary.

The rest of the book concerns Fleming's efforts to race Pingle back to civilization, both out of spite and in order to prevent the bilious guide from giving a misleading account of events. They beat him by mere hours, and, after a stop to see the British consul to negotiate a détente, Fleming and company returned to England, none the worse (or wiser) for the wear. An elaborately nonchalant telegram he sent his friend Rupert Hart-Davis before boarding the ship sums it all up: "BACK TWENTYSEVENTH . . . FIERCE FUN ABOUNDING HEALTH STARK MELODRAMA NO MAIL MONEY LUGGAGE OR REGRETS."

Even though nothing much happened to Peter Fleming in Brazil, he still enjoyed himself thoroughly. He made lots of undergraduate jokes, picked up some Portuguese, got a little bit better at rowing, climbed some trees. He met some savages, who weren't very savage, and dodged snakes, fish, and insects, which were annoyances rather than nemeses. All in all, the terrors of the jungle were fairly benign, and the genius of *Brazilian Adventure* is that Fleming made no attempt to hide this.

As a result, the book seems entirely real, even in its silliest moments. Fleming himself called *Brazilian Adventure* "probably the most veracious travel book ever written; and it is certainly the least instructive." At no point does the reader sense that Fleming is exaggerating his adventures for dramatic effect, or dwelling too long on the dangers that he faced.

(Instead, he occasionally goes too far in the other direction.) "There is little awe left current in the world, and little of that little is well bestowed," he writes. Fleming seems determined to save his awe for those things that really deserve it.

Compared to other South American travelogues of the era, *Brazilian Adventure* is most notable for what Fleming soft-pedaled or omitted. He made no great ado about alligators: "The alligator—at any rate the alligator of Central Brazil—is a fraud.... If he is not a fool

confident writer to do this, to trust that you can make a good story out of your experiences without resorting to embellishment. Fleming saw no reason to elevate natural phenomena to grandiose proportions; it was a failed and embarrassing tactic employed by the Pingles of the world, a style wholly unsuited for the modern age. And even during the trip itself, he made frequent mockery of such manly fustian by conversing in an exaggerated explorer's patois. Water was always "The Precious Fluid." A pis-

them back to Bélem. Still, the book's humor primarily derives from the expedition's haplessness, and the author and his party are almost always the butt of the joke. The pilot may have been drunk and stupid, but without him the Englishmen would have been unable to find their way home.

The success of *Brazilian Adventure* set Fleming on a career as an international journalist and travel writer. In 1934, he would publish *One's Company*, an account of his travels to China; *News from Tartary*, another book of his Asian travels, followed in 1936. He wrote reams of correspondence for the *Times* and other journals, and he turned to history later in life. But *Brazilian Adventure*, though his first book, remains his best. In it, he took a genre that was often stultifying and pedantic and infused it with grace and comedic understatement.

After Fleming came a flurry of better-written travel books. Evelyn Waugh, who gave *Brazilian Adventure* a positive if qualified review in the *Spectator* ("Mr. Fleming has a really exciting story to tell, but he almost spoils it by going to the extreme limits of deprecation in his anxiety to avoid the pretentious"), would soon publish his humorous account of his travels in Ethiopia. Robert Byron's *The Road to Oxiana* would follow, too, as would Graham Greene's *Journey Without Maps* and numerous other first-class works.

The critic Paul Fussell once described the 1920s and 1930s as a time when "a generation of bright young travelers set off from the British Isles to register anew, with all the cockiness of youth, the oddity and exoticism of the world outside." In his day, Fleming was the most prominent and most influential of this pack. By propelling travel writing out of the dregs of romanticism and landing it firmly in the modern era, he offered a new way to approach the wider world. *Brazilian Adventure* should be relished for its drollery and anticlimactic charm. But it is also a document of the time when the era of exploration slid into the era of irony; when the world became smaller and somewhat less new, and bemusement—not amazement—became the standard way to meet it. **CJR**

JUSTIN PETERS is CJR's managing editor/Web.

It takes a tremendously confident writer to trust that you can make a good story out of your experiences without resorting to embellishment.

and a coward, he might just as well be, so assiduously hidden are his cunning and his courage." Unlike Roosevelt, he paid little heed to piranhas, who "might have been poultry for all the harm we took walking among them." Unlike Landor, he brushed off the region's swarming insects: "It is, of course, damaging to one's self-respect to find oneself dotted with insects against whom popular prejudice is so strong that I begin to wonder whether I should ever have mentioned them at all. But one's self-respect was the only thing that suffered, for they caused no pain or irritation." And unlike almost everyone who had come before him, he concluded that the journey's strains actually made for a fundamentally pleasant experience.

Musing over why his experience of Brazil was different from that of his predecessors, he notes: "If a country contains regions very remote and almost unknown, everyone conspires to paint them in the most lurid colours possible, for two very good reasons: the few men who have been to them naturally want to make a good story out of their experiences, and the many inhabitants of the country who might have been to them like to have a good excuse for not having done so." It takes a tremendously

tol shot was "the well-known bark of a Mauser." (Churchward's book indicates just how annoying this must have been to the other travelers.) By rendering ridiculous the standard clichés, Fleming allowed himself to slip the constraints of lantern-slide journalism and write about what actually happened.

There are things that are bad about *Brazilian Adventure*. Fleming is an undisciplined narrator, prone to observational excursions that sap the story's momentum. The author's casual racism, though wholly a product of its time, will nonetheless unnerve the modern reader. All in all, it reads very much like what it is: a first book, written in two months and from all appearances not heavily edited.

It is also enormously funny, so that you quickly forgive its flaws. Other British travel narratives of the time (and some earlier ones, such as Captain Marryat's *Diary in America*) are funny, too. Yet their humor is principally derived from descriptions of the stupidity of the natives and the inadequacy of the country in which the author traveled. To be sure, Fleming does some of that in *Brazilian Adventure*: he takes much glee in the antics of a drunken and cowardly river pilot whom they engaged to guide

Memoir of a Pugilist

Hitchens in light and shade

BY SCOTT SHERMAN

IN EARLY 1966, SHORTLY AFTER HE moved to the United States, the witty and urbane English journalist Henry Fairlie wrote an extended essay about the American newspaper scene for *Encounter*, the London-based, CIA-sponsored periodical. Fairlie extolled the range, depth, and professionalism of American newspaper reporting. Halfway through his treatise, however, he delivered a tart observation: "That most American journalists have yet to learn to write is an accepted fact of American journalism, of every kind and at every level." What mystified Fairlie, a veteran of London's newspaper skirmishes, was the Americans' "lack of style."

Fifteen years later, another witty and urbane English journalist arrived in the U.S. with a single suitcase. His name was Christopher Hitchens, and he immediately began to offer—in the pages of *Grand Street*, *In These Times*, and *The Nation*, where he was soon given a column—master classes on the very subject that had vexed Henry Fairlie: literary style. Before long, his elegant and acrobatic prose drew the attention of leading New York publishers, and in 1988, when he was thirty-nine, his first collection appeared. *Prepared for the Worst* ranged far and wide: dispatches from the battlegrounds of Nicaragua, El Salvador, Lebanon, and Argentina; political pieces, etched in acid, on subjects from the Iran-contra affair to the rise of neoconservatives like Norman Podhoretz; and essays on Thomas Paine, George Orwell, Noam Chomsky, and Conor Cruise O'Brien.

Also impressive were the blurbs on the back cover from four notables: Oliver Stone ("a breath of Tom Paine for our time"), Salman Rushdie (he "deserves, in spite of his inexplicable wrongheadedness on pages 225–27, to be celebrated with much gusto"), Martin Amis ("When I see Mr. Hitchens's name among a magazine's contributors, I want to save him until last but always end up reading him first"), and Leon Edel ("Hitchens has wisdom colored by wit"). On a cursory glance, Edel's endorsement seemed out of place. Surely the eighty-one-year-old scholar—who wrote a towering five-volume biography of Henry James and edited the journals of Edmund Wilson—represented the old guard. But Edel's blurb was a telegram aimed at the American literary establishment, and its meaning was clear: here is an

Hitch-22: A Memoir

By Christopher Hitchens
Twelve
435 pages, \$26.99

extremely precocious young writer fully at home in the quarterlies, the weeklies, the op-ed pages, and in the realm of literature. Look out.

THE BRITISH THEATER CRITIC KENNETH Tynan kept the following words above his writing desk: "Rouse tempers, goad and lacerate, raise whirlwinds." In the 1980s and early 1990s, it seemed that Tynan's credo had been tailored to fit the young Hitchens, whose persona in print somehow combined the wit of Oscar Wilde, the steely intelligence of Susan Sontag, the hard-bitten anti-imperialism of Gore Vidal, the bitchy humor of Truman Capote, and the swagger of Norman Mailer.

His rise was inexorable. In 1992 Hitchens became a columnist for *Vanity Fair*, and no writer in the country deserved the job more. He went on to write for every major periodical except *The New Yorker*, and produced a shelf of books. To be sure, his aura was partly the result of his exertions outside journalism: Hitchens loaned his linguistic firepower to a frail and demoralized American left, and was an electrifying (if rumpled and grandiloquent) speaker at countless rallies and public events from Berkeley to Madison to Manhattan. In front of a microphone, his only real competition was the Reverend Jesse Jackson.

"Journalists cannot expect their work to last," James Salter wrote in his introduction to A. J. Liebling's memoir of Paris, *Between Meals*. "Even Dreiser's or Hemingway's articles are of little interest to us.... Autobiography, though, is another matter, as is memoir...." With his sixtieth birthday behind him, Hitchens has now written an account of his life. And the first chapter of *Hitch-22*, which concerns his mother, contains some of the most stirring prose of his career.

Trapped in a stale marriage to a tight-lipped career Navy man ("The Commander") and forced to reside, for the most part, in provincial towns, Yvonne Hitchens sought pleasure and freedom in stylish attire (she made an ill-fated attempt to run a dress shop) and glittering conversation ("The one unforgivable sin," she said, "is to be boring"). But she had large ambitions for her children, and Hitchens, at a very young age, once heard her remark to her husband: "If there is

going to be an upper class in this country, then Christopher is going to be in it." When her sons were grown, Yvonne took a lover—"a poet and a dreamer"—but her life was headed off the rails. In 1973, Hitchens got a rare call from his father: "Do you happen to know where your mother is?" She was in Athens, where she had just committed suicide, with her distraught lover, in a hotel room.

Hitchens's account of his subsequent journey to a Greece reeling from political upheaval is unforgettable. (Even on a trip to identify his mother's body, he couldn't resist a literary errand: he lunched with Chester Kallman, the poet and companion of W.H. Auden, who had died a few weeks earlier. Kallman, we are precisely informed, was afflicted "with an almost grannyish trembling and protruding lower lip.") To his mother's life, Hitchens adds this coda:

She was the cream in the coffee, the gin in the Campari, the offer of wine or champagne instead of beer, the laugh in the face of bores and purses and skinflints, the insurance against bigots and prudes. Her defeat and despair were also mine for a long time, but I have reason to know that she wanted me to withstand the woe....

Nothing in the book equals the chapter about Yvonne Hitchens, but there are reasons to keep reading. *Hitch-22* includes sprightly pages on the author's years at Oxford (where he would protest by day and raise glasses with the dons at night); his expedition to Cuba in 1968 (a tray of daiquiri rum cocktails greeted him at the airport, but he still managed to educate himself about the revolution); and his early years as a journalist in London (during a job interview at the *Times*, Hitchens confessed that he was a socialist, which brought this reply from his interlocutor: "Fine, fine, my dear boy: don't look so defensive. More socialists on the *Times* than you would probably guess"). There is a haunting chapter about his travels in Poland, Argentina, and Portugal in the 1970s. And yes, there is a pug-nacious chapter on Iraq, in which Hitchens reaches deep into his bag of literary and rhetorical tricks to justify his support for George W. Bush's war.

Reading this non-apologetic apolo-

gia, which is more than a little defensive, I was reminded of a quote from his wife, Carol Blue, that appeared in Ian Parker's incisive *New Yorker* profile of Hitchens in 2006: her husband resembled "those men who were never really in battle and wished they had been." At least one young man in battle took Hitchens's prowar declarations very seriously. The decision of Mark Jennings Daily, a UCLA honors graduate, to fight in Iraq was partly inspired by an article in which, by the author's own account, he "poured scorn on those who were neutral" about the war. Daily was killed in Mosul in 2007, and Hitchens's guilt is palpable.

SINCE HITCHENS CARES SO DEEPLY about literary judgments (his oeuvre is almost devoid of references to painters, dancers, musicians, and filmmakers), let it be said that, at the level of the sentence and the paragraph, the writing in *Hitch-22* is mostly gorgeous. But the book feels too long and too uneven: some chapters are lean, others are bloated. In the latter, Hitchens is like a jazz saxophonist who crams too many notes into his solos. Names clog the pages: "My later friend Jessica Mitford... my Argentine anti-fascist friend Jacobo Timerman... my beloved friend Christopher Buckley." My patience gave out when I reached the chapter about Martin Amis, in which the speed of the name-dropping—and the intensity of the backslapping and self-satisfaction—becomes insufferable. We are supposed to be impressed that the young Amis recited, from memory, "a spine-tingling rendition of Humbert Humbert's last verbal duel with Quilty," and that "Martin has done the really hard thinking about handjobs." If an enemy of Hitchens were to write about a friend in such gushing terms, Hitchens would annihilate him.

Hitch-22 is a book I looked forward to reading. Since the 1980s, the two journalists who have brought me the most pleasure and enlightenment, and whose books would accompany me to that fabled desert island, have been Christopher Hitchens and Murray Kempton, who wrote for *Newsday* and *The New York Review of Books* before his death in 1997. The two had certain things in common: both traveled in the sectarian left (Kempton in the Young Communist League and

the Socialist Party in the 1930s, Hitchens in the International Socialists); both could effortlessly summon an exquisite aphorism from Flaubert, Chekhov, and Yeats; and both were prolific. Hitchens's writing has more clarity and thrust, but sometimes that clarity leads to rhetorical overkill, as in his many polemics against Bill Clinton. Kempton's prose could be opaque—in the way that Joseph Conrad's prose was sometimes opaque—but he had a greater sense of ambiguity and nuance, and a more acute, novelistic grasp of human psychology. Kempton was a writer. Hitchens is a writer, a celebrity, and a showman—and not always in that order.

Sometimes the work of these journalistic icons overlapped. In June 1989, both of them reviewed a major exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art titled "Goya and the Spirit of Enlightenment," which contained Goya's phantasmagoric depictions of Napoleon's conquest of Spain. For Hitchens, writing in *The Nation*, it was a rare foray into art criticism, but his prose was muscular and confident: "Despite its many painterly glories and its bolts of brilliant humor and bitterness, the [exhibition] suffers from the appearance of having been edited to suit a liberal sensibility." Kempton's approach, in *New York Newsday*, was more tentative: "I have been three times to the... great Goya exhibit; and I find myself less and less able to understand." Awed by the mysteries of Goya's genius, and shaken by the atrocities depicted in the works, Kempton left the show with thoughts of "mists and shadows."

Kempton valued Hitchens, and vice versa. I think Kempton would have admired the verve and intelligence on display in *Hitch-22*, while turning away from the blustering patriotism and narcissism. (If only Hitchens had the modesty of a James Baldwin, who affirmed in the preface to *Notes of a Native Son*: "I want to be an honest man and a good writer.") I still look for the Hitchens byline, and probably always will. But these days, when I scan my bookshelves, I find myself drawn to Kempton's mists and shadows more than Hitchens's sermons and certainties. **CJR**

SCOTT SHERMAN is a contributing writer to *The Nation* and a contributing editor to *CJR*.

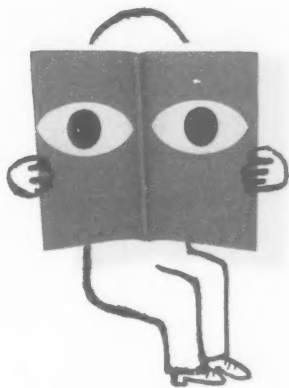
BRIEF ENCOUNTERS

BY JAMES BOYLAN

A Modern Instance

By William Dean Howells
J.R. Osgood and Company
514 pages, available online for free

MORE THAN 125 YEARS after his creation, Bartley Hubbard is still with us in spirit. The self-regarding, unprincipled protagonist of William Dean Howells's *A Modern Instance* (1882) remains an undying portrayal of journalism's dark side. Drawing on his own experiences in journalism and his observation of the disorderly Boston press of the 1870s, Howells sketched a Faustian story. Hubbard arrives in Boston, newly married, from the editorship of a small weekly in Maine. He quickly grasps how to popularize, expose, and sell. He insinuates himself onto a paper that employs him to interview major advertisers and write flattering profiles—a sleazy synergy that has yet to go out of style. Absorbing his lessons quickly, Hubbard sees the reading public as consumers of sensation, and argues for an apolitical, even amoral, omnibus newspaper, covering all the highs and lows of society: "If the community is full of vice and crime, the newspaper can't do better than reflect its condition." His philosophical antagonist is an editor, Ricker, who insists that "a newspaper [is] a public enterprise...sacredly bound not to do anything to deprave or debauch its readers...not to mislead or betray them." The idealistic



Ricker remains an assistant editor. Hubbard rises to the top, for a time, but his behavior reflects the amorality of his ideal newspaper. Calamities follow: loss of job, the divorce that comprises the main narrative, and finally Hubbard's murder at the hands of an offended reader in Arizona. The Ricker-Hubbard debate continues, in varying forms, to this day. The good-guy side of journalism claims that it is the keystone of democracy and the balance wheel of society; the other side is more reluctant to state its claims outright, but in these desperate days, scrambles to do whatever will seize and hold an audience. And often these two sides are embedded in a single institution, or even a single journalist. All of which is to say that the culture clash captured by Howells more than a century ago is a modern one indeed. (*A Modern Instance* can be read in its original format at <http://www.archive.org/details/amoderninstance00howegoog>.)

**Doris Fleeon:
Incomparably the
First Political
Journalist of Her Time**
By Carolyn Saylor
Sunstone Press
302 pages, \$32.95

DORIS FLEESON IS one of the half-lost pioneers of the pre-feminist era of political journalism. A Kansan who learned her trade on the New York *Daily News*, she came to Washington

at the dawn of the New Deal. She and her husband, John O'Donnell, collaborated on a column called "Capital Stuff." In 1933, she was one of the brave souls who stepped forward to help found the journalists' new union, the American Newspaper Guild. As O'Donnell and the *News* turned to the right, he and Fleeon divorced. It was Fleeon, of course, who lost her job. During World War II, she became an overseas correspondent for *Woman's Home Companion*. On her own after the war, Fleeon began a syndicated column that combined diligent reporting, cultivation of sources, and liberal perspectives. She was the first Washington-based female reporter to have her work syndicated throughout the United States. Eventually she appeared in seventy newspapers, and was characterized by *Time* magazine as the capital's "top news hen"—a well-meaning compliment of precisely the sort that Fleeon's career would make obsolete. For the next twenty

years, she filed her column and robustly resisted the inevitable discrimination of that era against women journalists. She collected a host of worthy prizes and a cadre of younger admirers, including Mary McGrory, Liz Carpenter, and Helen Thomas. (Thomas, the recently dethroned grande dame of the Washington press corps, was particularly impressed by the even-handed quality of Fleeon's work, which she called "straight, balanced, [and] unbiased.") Fleeon married again, to Dan Kimball, under secretary of the Navy; they died within hours of each other in 1970. This biography contains plentiful and illuminating excerpts from Fleeon's correspondence with such famous friends as H.L. Mencken and Eleanor Roosevelt, and sufficient quotations from her work. Like many journalists, Fleeon herself disdained autobiography or reminiscence. The biographer, a friend of the Fleeon relatives in Kansas, relies on the family connection and on her subject's papers at the University of Kansas, but doesn't really get out and dig, Fleeon-style, into what might have been available in resources farther afield, especially in Washington. Still, a pioneering journalist finally has a footnote in history. **CJR**

JAMES BOYLAN is the founding editor of the *Columbia Journalism Review* and professor emeritus of journalism and history at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

American Soldiers

Think you know them? Sebastian Junger says you have no idea.

BY TOM BISSELL

AT ONE POINT IN *WAR*, SEBASTIAN Junger is nearly blown to smithereens by a roadside bomb in Afghanistan's Korengal Valley. This serves to reinforce his earlier point: journalistic objectivity, which is "difficult enough while covering a city council meeting," is not really possible while in a war zone. Nor, in conditions of horrific violence, is it particularly advisable. As Junger notes, the least of your problems as a war correspondent is "bonding with the men around you."

For similar (though much less intense) reasons, my appraisal of *War* falls short of proper critical objectivity. For one thing, I have met the author a few times and like and admire him immensely. More than that, though, this book affected me in a way I did not expect. I come from a military family and grew up with a father unknowably mangled by his experience as a Marine in Vietnam. I briefly and incompetently covered the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 and spent five weeks embedded with a Marine combat logistics battalion in Iraq's Sunni Triangle in 2005. I have written a book about one war (Vietnam) and read literally hundreds of books about other wars. I like to think I have made a serious noncombatant effort to understand something about war, and occasionally I allow myself to believe I do. That belief survived approximately thirty pages into my reading of *War*, which left me sickened, moved, terrified, awed, and angry, and which now takes its place among the best works on the subject that I have read.

Many journalistic accounts of combat have a strangely limited emotional register. It may be that getting shot at is neither more nor less interesting than it sounds. Some accounts take the path of diffidence, shrugging off combat as part of the reporter's job (it most certainly is not; journalists can, in fact, hinder a platoon's efficacy, which Junger acknowledges more than once). Others take the path of sensory overload, describing the whistle of every incoming shell and the sonic snap of every close-call bullet. Whatever the case, I can think of very few journalistic accounts of combat that do not, in some way, demideify those who fight, though how and why this occurs is probably very obvious.

Junger takes a somewhat different approach. Of course, he tells us, he was in

War
By Sebastian Junger
Twelve
304 pages, \$26.99

awe of the soldiers he is writing about. Of course war is "insanely exciting." Of course the soldiers he was with did not care to contemplate the politics of their deployment. Of course the thoughts that streak across one's mind while under fire are weirdly banal. Thanks to the Decade of the Embedded Journalist, these are all familiar tropes. The insights to which many correspondents build, Junger simply accepts as given and moves on. This allows him to explore his subject from some rather novel angles. Indeed, very few books about combat use the word "love" as often as this one.

Much of the book's narrative takes place in a U.S. Army outpost called Restrepo, named for a beloved medic who was killed in action. Restrepo is found in a place so remote, mountainous, and reflexively hostile to outsiders that during the Soviet war in Afghanistan, the invaders "never made it past the mouth of the valley." Insecurely stationed within the base is the Second Platoon of Battle Company, itself part of the recently resurrected 173rd Airborne Brigade, which had been decommissioned after the Vietnam War due to disproportionately high casualty rates—an ominous legacy that hangs over the entire book.

Junger quickly learns that life within Battle Company's lonely, bullet-riddled, and mortar-cratered outposts—some of which are attacked as often as four times a day—is categorically unlike that of any other current theater of American war. The intensity of the fighting gives pause even to the company's Iraq War veterans. And the book's nightmarishly detailed battle and ambush scenes are part of a much larger story: from 2005 to April 2010, the United States military has sacrificed almost four dozen soldiers while defending its positions in the Korengal Valley, which is all of six miles long. The experience of the Second Platoon is unique, as is the type of war they are fighting. In some ways this book is less a work of combat reportage than it is an anthropological study of a tiny, violent planet.

Junger's central question is this: What happens when a few dozen young men have nearly every conceivable civilizing influence—even by the standards of a war zone—stripped away from them, and are then exposed to more than a year of fre-

quent combat against an evasive and intractable enemy? How do emotions like fear, courage, and love change, intensify, and distort within such an inferno? Junger discovers that, for the men fighting in the Korengal Valley, war is something formless and intermolecular, an airborne toxin as euphoric as it is lethal.

I have never felt more admiration for a group of American soldiers than I did after finishing this book. I have also never been more terrified by a group of American soldiers. Most members of the Second Platoon want to fight and kill; some even claim to live for firefights. A number of them have *INFIDEL* tattooed across their chests. When they hear one of their scouts describe a wounded insurgent crawling along a mountain path toward his own blown-off leg, they lustily cheer. Almost all are, by their own admission, terrible garrison soldiers: undisciplined, lippy, and disdainful of any authority unscarred by combat. Jacked up on testosterone, fuel-injected by adrenaline, emotionally shaped by sexual deprivation, and under mortal pressure, they joke about raping mothers and sisters and even one another. (One soldier fond of “smoochy come-ons” is finally asked outright if he would have sex with another man. Sure, he says. “It would be gay not to.”) The men of the Second Platoon show their admiration and respect by subjecting the object of that respect to a savage group beating. Shockingly, not even the Second Platoon’s commanding officers are exempt from this ritual, which is widely practiced within another American subculture: street gangs.

Following the release of the notorious WikiLeaks video that shows the American pilot of an Apache helicopter firing into a crowd of Iraqis who do not appear to pose any immediate threat, many were appalled by the pilot’s lighthearted running commentary. Nobody expected the pilot to blurt out a meditative essay on the morality of warfare. Still, the *glee* with which he and his colleagues responded to men (and, as it turned out, children) being torn to shreds by bullets seemed almost inhuman.

Americans like to imagine that we understand the soldier. We know, of course, that we cannot comprehend his experience, but we feel sure that the sol-

Junger discovers that, for the men fighting in the Korengal Valley, war is something formless and intermolecular, an airborne toxin as euphoric as it is lethal.

dier, at the end of the day, is probably not terribly unlike ourselves—which is to say, inclined to do the right thing, whatever that may be. Much encourages us in this assumption. Since 2001, no one has enjoyed higher iconic standing within our popular culture than the American soldier. Our politicians speak of him as though he were a holy knight of democracy. We clap for him on airplanes. We give him our seats on buses and trains and subways. We wear our yellow ribbons. We thank him for his service.

What this obeisance tends to obscure is that a soldier is someone who has been trained to kill without hesitation. Most soldiers, of course, never get the chance, but infantry units are different. Any man who fights within an unusually imperiled platoon must possess a willingness to kill that would probably strike most civilians as psychopathic.

For his part, Junger admits to being troubled when he hears the Second Platoon laugh at the plight of the wounded insurgent crawling toward his own severed leg: “I couldn’t stop thinking about that cheer; in some ways it was more troubling than all the killing that was going on. Stripped of all politics, the fact of the matter was that the man had died alone on a mountainside trying to find his leg.”

When Junger finally talks to a member of the Second Platoon about it, he is told, “The cheering comes from knowing that that’s someone we’ll never have to fight again.” I do not find that very convincing, and neither, I think, does Junger. As he writes:

Combat was a game that the United States had asked Second Platoon to become very good at, and once they had, the United States had put them on a hilltop without women, hot food, running water, communication with the outside world, or any kind of en-

tertainment for over a year. Not that the men were complaining, but that sort of thing has consequences. Society can give its young men almost any job and they’ll figure out how to do it. They’ll suffer for it and die for it and watch their friends die for it, but in the end, it *will* get done. That only means that society should be careful about what it asks for.

War concludes with ominous scenes that show a few members of the Second Platoon failing in their initial attempts to adjust to normal life. This is war-story convention, of course, and one’s usual emotion is to pity the soldier and agonize over the moral rightness of his deployment. But my feelings for the men of the Second Platoon, most of whom volunteered for their rough duty and were fully aware of what they were getting into, were more ambivalent—and yet, at the same time, less judgmental. When one soldier tells Junger he wants to go back to Restrepo, it is clear that his fight is no longer against a foreign insurgency but the confines of normal life.

It is probably a fantasy to imagine that a career or loving partner or anything at all could compare to knowing that everyone around you would die for you in a moment—a certainty that only the pressures of combat can reliably provide. I now know, thanks to Sebastian Junger’s book, that anyone capable of enduring the terrors of the Korengal Valley deserves something more than a kind word, adulation, or even thanks. A soldier at his best can be a terrible, frightening thing, and his most heroic journey may not be to war but away from it. **CJR**

TOM BISSELL is the author of five books, including his most recent, *Extra Lives: Why Video Games Matter*.

Around the Bend

A new book charts *Commentary's* slide into irrelevance

BY ETHAN PORTER

IN APRIL OF THIS YEAR, A SMALL CRACK emerged in the usually monolithic conservative movement. Julian Sanchez, a fellow at the libertarian Cato Institute, diagnosed today's right wing with "epistemic closure"—an unwillingness to consider new ideas and new evidence. Inspired by this intramural ankle-biting, Jim Manzi, an editor at the *National Review*, soon took to that magazine's blog The Corner (normally a bastion of party-line conservatism) to blast author and radio host Mark Levin's denial of global warming. The reaction to this sortie only proved Sanchez's initial point. Within twenty-four hours, two fellow Corner bloggers attacked Manzi and stridently defended Levin, on mostly personal, not policy, grounds.

To those of us on the outside, the "epistemic closure" of the right wing has been obvious for some time. The vibrant conservatism of the postwar period, one defined by argument and the exchange of ideas, is a distant memory. Candid debates about America's place in the world, the welfare state, and religion's utility have been replaced by the endless parroting of talking points and unquestioning worship of the Republican Party's electoral interests. How and why did conservatism stop thinking?

Benjamin Balint knows at least part of the answer. In *Running Commentary: The Contentious Magazine That Transformed the Jewish Left Into the Neoconservative Right*, he masterfully charts both the history of the little Jewish journal that could and the ensuing rise and fall of conservative intellectualism. The success of Balint's book is especially remarkable given his close proximity to his subject. Now a Jerusalem-based fellow of the Hudson Institute, Balint was earlier a junior *Commentary* editor, and obviously retains some affection for the magazine. Yet his book is no mash note. Instead, it is a surprising account of how *Commentary* steered neoconservatism to the height of power while leading it intellectually astray.

The beginnings of this tale are familiar enough. Spurred on by the dynamism of the City College cafeteria—where the anti-Stalinist left famously mixed it up with those more friendly to the Soviet dictator—as well as by the gale-force winds of history, Jewish intellectual life during and after World War II was in upheaval.

**Running Commentary:
The Contentious Magazine That
Transformed the Jewish Left
Into the Neoconservative Right**

By Benjamin Balint
PublicAffairs
304 pages, \$26.95

Jews were at once outside mainstream American culture and striving to break in. Some of this was plainly the fault of that culture: quota systems and (mostly) latent anti-Semitism kept many Jews out of the elite precincts in politics and academe. Yet Clement Greenberg, later a *Commentary* managing editor and an influential art critic, could plausibly proclaim that "[n]o people on earth are... more provincial" than the mass of middle-class Jews.

When the American Jewish Committee founded the magazine in 1945 and appointed Elliot Cohen its first editor, there was hope that the publication could change all this. "American Jewry more and more must stand wholly on its own feet," mused Salo Baron in the first issue. An essential thesis of the magazine in its early incarnation was that, through the refinement of their ideas, Jews could move beyond the devastation of the Holocaust and achieve a coherent sense of themselves as a people in America.

For the first twenty years of his stewardship, Cohen was a wildly successful editor, winning *Commentary* the sort of influence that had never before been wielded by an explicitly Jewish publication. (One of the many joys of Balint's story is his description of the Jewish magazine that preceded *Commentary*, such as the *Menorah Journal*, which more or less have been lost to history but were enormously important in their time.) The only comparable precedent, the Yiddish-language (and socialist) *Jewish Daily Forward*, was read in Roosevelt's White House. Yet the *Forward's* achievements pale beside those of *Commentary*.

Between 1945 and the early 1960s, *Commentary* was the first English-language periodical to publish excerpts from Anne Frank's diary, and it gave early exposure to both Saul Bellow and Philip Roth. The magazine also offered a voice to the Jewish intellectual left—one more religious than, say, the *Partisan Review*, but no less substantive. Perhaps most importantly, the idea that Jews should feel at home in America began to gain salience in *Commentary's* pages. The magazine's writers, Balint notes, "no longer assumed that a sense of belonging endangered the free exercise of critical intelligence."

The conventional wisdom of the pre-

war Jewish left, which regarded America from a critical distance at best and with disdain at worst, had been upended by global conflagration. The intellectuals who clustered around *Commentary* proposed a way forward. America—mainstream, middle-class America—deserved affection after all. As Leslie Fielder, a *Commentary* regular, so memorably put it: “What a lot of us said in the depths of our hearts was, ‘If the system has been this good to us, it can’t be as bad as we thought it was.’” Patriotism went from vice to virtue, and communism, with which the Jewish left had always been on at least nodding terms, became a *bête noire*.

Yet if the seeds of a chest-beating, jingoistic neoconservatism were planted in those heady postwar days, they were soon uprooted. Cohen suffered a nervous breakdown and eventually committed suicide. The irascible, unpredictable Norman Podhoretz took over, and swerved the magazine leftward. “Podhoretz’s most sweeping change involved dismissing hard anti-Communism,” writes Balint. The magazine also campaigned against the Vietnam War, published anarchist writer Paul Goodman, and even featured an interview with Stokely Carmichael.

Commentary, it should be noted, was never of the New Left. In the end, the magazine remained skeptical of what it considered an illiberal movement. And it turned its swords on those who opposed Israel’s behavior in the 1967 war, scoffing at the utopian “universalists who avoided allegiance to any nation-state,” as Balint puts it. In fact, the pigeon-hole-proof complexity of Podhoretz’s *Commentary* and the dynamism of its debates are what placed it at the vital center of the publishing scene. Even the *Nation*’s publisher (and now *CJR*’s chairman), Victor Navasky, conceded that, in the mid-1960s, “Norman was publishing the most interesting magazine in America.” For political and intellectual movers and shakers, its unpredictability made it a must-read.

IRVING KRISTOL FAMOUSLY PROCLAIMED that the neoconservatives were “liberals mugged by reality.” But it’s never been clear when, exactly, the mugging occurred. There was the left’s hostility to

Grand thinking gave way to the pursuit of short-term influence.

Israel following the Six Day War; there was the Brownsville teachers’ strike, when black parents were pitted against white, mostly Jewish, teachers; and there was the general climate of insanity that prevailed on the left in those days, when Abbie Hoffman expressed (only half-jokingly) his desire for children to kill their parents. But taken together, or examined individually, none of these factors sufficiently explain the one-hundred-and-eighty-degree shift in thinking. One minute *Commentary* was publishing Norman Mailer, mixing it up with both the right and the left, and the next it was the house organ for neoconservatism.

Balint isn’t entirely clear on what explains this shift. But he does seem to have a villain in mind, if we are to judge from his spectacularly unflattering picture of Norman Podhoretz. The arrogant young editor of the 1960s, who was prone to downing thirteen (!) martinis at lunch, becomes a cranky older man. And something of a crackpot. At one point, he all but accuses Thomas Friedman of anti-Semitism. At another, he insinuates that homosexuals deserve AIDS.

The reader imagines Balint hunched over Podhoretz’s public pronouncements of the last forty years, eagerly pouncing on the most preposterous. The author is also extremely generous to Podhoretz’s critics. He features, for instance, Isaiah Berlin’s priceless reply to Podhoretz’s argument that the philosopher should have stiff-armed *The New York Review of Books*, which published the dreaded Noam Chomsky. “I see,” replied Berlin. “You are accusing me of being a fellow-traveler of a fellow-traveler.”

Balint hangs the failures of conservatism around Podhoretz’s neck. This is an indictment by implication—but an effective one, especially when Balint lets Podhoretz make his case for him. Surely he must have relished using this quote from a piece Podhoretz wrote for

The New Republic in 1965: “A sense of alienation from political power may be good, even necessary, for the health of magazines based in New York.” This is rich. The same writer who wrote those words soon came to view the imprimatur of the establishment and political classes as the ultimate prize, as striving for approval came to define *Commentary*’s later period.

Grand thinking gave way to the pursuit of short-term influence, as Podhoretz and his cohort prodded Reagan to oppose the Soviets more vociferously, formed committees in favor of a stronger national defense, and sought White House appointments. Intellectual coherence was forgotten. Ultimately, the same men and women who doubted liberalism’s ability to remake America had no doubt that America could remake the world—a catastrophic inconsistency that led to the Iraq War.

Podhoretz’s tireless march to the top of the political order was completed in 2004, when George W. Bush awarded him the Presidential Medal of Freedom. By then, the deterioration and collapse of his magazine had been under way for decades. Naming a great writer who’s gotten his or her start at *Commentary* since the 1960s is a chore. A recent cover piece by Jonah Goldberg, “What Kind of Socialist Is Barack Obama?,” would have been better as self-parody than what it was: further evidence of the magazine’s long slide into inanity. At the very least, the saga of decline in *Running Commentary* suggests that the thirst for power—the desire to plunge into the mainstream—has a toxic effect on the intellectual’s capacity for doubt and introspection.

Balint mournfully concludes with Elliot Cohen’s thoughts upon founding *Commentary*. “We may well see the Jewish intellectual-religious tradition flower in ways that will stand comparison with Spain, Germany, Eastern Europe, and elsewhere,” the first editor wrote. One wonders if Cohen’s successor ever read that high-minded charge. The gap between *Commentary*’s ambitions and what it has become is too large to measure. For when Podhoretz stopped thinking, conservatism did too. **CJR**

ETHAN PORTER is the managing editor of *Democracy: A Journal of Ideas*.

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Philadelphia Story

BY MICHAEL SCHUDSON AND JULIA SONNEVEND



In this column, the authors cull current scholarly writing about journalism for fresh ideas. Suggestions for possible mention are welcome at editors@cjr.org

EVERYBODY KNOWS THAT NEWSPAPERS have been cutting jobs, cutting services, cutting corners. It is not so widely acknowledged that these cuts seem to be keeping them in the ring. Advertising is down, circulation is down, stories and pages are down, but the boxer keeps getting up again. The fighter still remains.

But how to assess the impact of these losses?

There are some numbers—on advertising, on circulation. The rough figures about newsroom employment could scarcely be more frightening—total daily newspaper newsroom staff fell from close to 60,000 to just over 40,000 from the early 2000s to 2009 (see the indispensable Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism's 2009 and 2010 "State of the Media" reports). But even that number only hints at the outcome measure that most concerns people who worry about democracy when the bulldogs of watchdog journalism morph into terriers: the amount, breadth, and quality of public-affairs reporting.

One hope is that the efficiencies in reporting realized in recent years—more nimble and comprehensive computer search, increasingly accessible government (and other) databases, and the intensified loops of response and correction from armies of online bloggers and critics—have offset the huge losses to newsroom jobs.

A new study by J-Lab takes a stab at this issue. J-Lab is a nonprofit that encourages innovation in journalism, affiliated with the American University School of Communication. Its report (www.j-lab.org/publications/philadelphia_media_project), authored by Jan Schaffer, J-Lab's executive director and a former *Philadelphia Inquirer* reporter, evaluated the state of news in Philadelphia. It concludes with a proposal for a networked news collaborative in Philadelphia to take advantage of a rapidly growing array of online start-ups as well as the strength of other longstanding Philadelphia resources in news organizations, journalism education, and community philanthropy. But perhaps most interesting for readers beyond Philadelphia's environs is Schaffer's study of a week's worth of news in *The Philadelphia Inquirer* in 2009 compared to what it was in 2006.

The study found that the number of "public-affairs stories" that focused on Philadelphia news dropped 17.4 percent, from 190 to 157. Column inches of public affairs

news also dropped 17 percent. The *Philadelphia Daily News* had much less local public-affairs reporting to begin with in 2006—eighty-three stories, dropping just 7.2 percent to seventy-seven in 2009. Its total column inches actually increased 5 percent because a third of the stories were opinion columns that, at 600 words each, were longer than many of the very short news articles. Overall, the *Inquirer* lost seven full pages of news over the course of a month while the *Daily News* gained a qualified full page. Altogether, it is not a close call: there has been a substantial loss in public-affairs news reporting in Philadelphia in just three turbulent years.

Public-affairs stories on Philadelphia commercial TV also declined, though "there wasn't a great deal of public affairs reporting to begin with." In 2006, the four Philadelphia commercial TV stations broadcast thirty-two minutes on local public affairs in the sample week, down to seventeen minutes in 2009.

J-Lab uses the data to suggest that we not curse the darkness, but light a candle—the "networked journalism collaborative." A collaborative could build on Philadelphia's plethora of blogs and public-policy Web sites—J-Lab counts at least 260 of them, including "about 60" that have "some journalistic DNA in that they report news, not just comment on it." Mayor Michael Nutter's press secretary remarks that his media list has grown from "about 40 to 700 in the last two years," a stunning figure, evidence of seismic rumbles beneath the still largely familiar media surface.

So there's excitement and hope for new opportunities. But the decline by more than one-sixth in local public-affairs reporting in the primary source of local news in a major American metropolis is the distress signal in this report. Will this figure hold up with more comprehensive study? Is it possible that the quantity of news dropped but quality rose? J-Lab did not measure quality. But however the discussion might deepen, we can be confident that this is not only a Philadelphia story. **CJR**

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The Lower Case

Astronaut welcomes baby from space

Times-News (Erie, PA) 11/23/09

Man says guinea pig killed humanely

The Free Lance-Star (Fredericksburg, VA) 3/25/10

Woman attacked by King Street Station

The Washington Post 4/14/10

Town officials: Movement anticipated on Virginia Creeper Trail bathroom project

Bristol (VA) Herald Courier 2/2/10

Craigslist killing suspects in Tacoma court

The Seattle Times 5/11/10

Man seeking help for dog charged with DWI

The (Syracuse, NY) Post-Standard 5/31/10

Man with cleaver in temple killed by police

The Blade (Toledo, OH) 4/9/10

County Traffic Accident Claims Life of Concrete Woman

KGMI.com (Bellingham, WA) 6/7/10

Pedestrian hit by patrol car, a second car dies

Florida Times-Union (Jacksonville, FL) 5/3/10

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Feature: "Eyes on the prize"

Howard Blume, *Los Angeles Times*
News Story: "Key L.A. Unified staff positions are funded privately"

Carol Veravanich, *Orange County Register*
Column: "Ask the Teacher"

Howard Blume, *Los Angeles Times*
Continuous Coverage: Education Issues

Katy Murphy, *Oakland Tribune*
Continuous Coverage: Education News

Roger Phillips, *The Stockton Record*
Continuous Coverage: Education News

Kamala Kelkar, *San Francisco Examiner*
News Story: "SF school district losing millions on meals"

Melissa Pamer, *Daily Breeze*
News Story: "Embattled principal Barraza removed from Dolores Street Elementary"

Neil Gonzales, *San Mateo County Times*
Feature: "District seeks space to grow"

Dennis Wyatt, *Manteca Bulletin*
Column: "Now that they've laid off 209 teachers, what is Manteca Unified doing next?"

Dawn M. Henley, *The Oakdale Leader*
Continuous Coverage: Education Issues

Tiffany Carney, *The Sunnyvale Sun*
Feature: "Students at Columbia turn classroom into profitable holiday card factory"

Mayra Flores De Marcotte, *Willow Glen Resident*
News Story: "Know-how"

Tiffany Carney, *The Sunnyvale Sun*
Series: "Homestead graduate uses humor, determination in lifelong battle against cancerous brain tumor" and "Homestead grad featured in Obama's speech"

Los Gatos Weekly-Times
Continuous Coverage: Education News

Lynne Melendez, *KGO-TV, ABC, San Francisco*
News Story: "Pink Friday Coverage"

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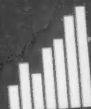
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